



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



TUESDAY — 5 APR 2022

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HEADLINE	04/05 Lab leaks possible; new pandemic?
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SOURCE	https://www.vox.com/22937531/virus-lab-safety-pandemic-prevention
GIST	<p>Decades ago, when the world first agreed on the norms and guidelines in the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), designing and producing biological weapons was expensive and difficult. The Soviet Union had a large program, which is suspected to have led to the accidental release of at least one influenza virus that caused tens of thousands of deaths. But the Soviets seem to have never finalized anything deadlier than what nature came up with.</p> <p>Terrorist groups engaged in biological terrorism — like the Aum Shinrikyo cult, which launched a botched bioattack in Japan in 1993 — have so far largely been unable to improve on anthrax, a naturally occurring pathogen that is deadly to those who inhale it but isn’t contagious and won’t circulate the globe the way a pandemic disease can.</p> <p>But our ability to engineer viruses has grown by leaps and bounds in recent years, thanks in part to the rapidly falling price of DNA sequencing and DNA synthesis technologies. Those advances have opened the door to innovations in medicine, but they also present a challenge: Viruses as deadly and disruptive as Covid-19, or potentially much much worse, are going to be possible to produce in labs worldwide soon, if not right now.</p> <p>To prevent pandemics that could be far worse than Covid-19, the world has to dramatically change our approach to managing global biological risks. “Amateur biologists can now accomplish feats that would have been impossible until recently for even the foremost experts in top-of-the-line laboratories,” argued Barry Pavel, a national security policy director at the Atlantic Council, and Atlantic Council co-author Vikram Venkatram.</p> <p>Avoiding a catastrophe in the coming decades will require us to take the risks of human-caused pandemics far more seriously, by doing everything from changing how we do research to making it harder for people to “print” themselves a copy of a deadly virus.</p> <p>Covid-19 was a warning shot for how fast a pandemic disease can spread around the world, and how ill-equipped we are to protect ourselves from a truly killer virus. If the world takes that warning shot seriously, we can insulate ourselves against the next pandemic, be it naturally occurring or human-made. With the right steps, we could even make ourselves “highly resistant if not immune to human-targeted biological threats,” MIT biologist Kevin Esvelt told me.</p> <p>But if we ignore the threat, the consequences could be devastating.</p> <p>Lab origins of pathogens, explained</p> <p>It isn’t known for certain whether the virus that caused Covid-19 was an accidental release from the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV), which was studying similar coronaviruses, or a far more common “zoonotic spillover” from an animal in the wild. An analysis by the US intelligence community found both possibilities plausible. A pair of preprint studies published in 2022 pointed toward a live animal market in Wuhan as the origin of the first outbreak.</p> <p>And recent reporting in Vanity Fair spotlighted risky and reckless research modifying coronaviruses in the lab to study whether they would infect humans more easily, and detailed how the scientists conducting such research closed ranks to ensure their work was not blamed for the pandemic.</p> <p>The reality is we may never know for sure. It can take years to conclusively trace back a zoonotic disease to its animal source, and China has made it clear it won’t cooperate with further investigations that could clarify any role WIV research may have played in Covid’s origin, however inadvertently.</p> <p>Whatever chain of events caused Covid-19, we already know that infectious disease outbreaks can originate in a lab. In 1978, a year after the final reported cases of smallpox in the wild, a lab leak caused an outbreak in the UK.</p> <p>Photographer Janet Parker died, while her mother got a mild case and recovered; more than 500 people who’d been exposed were vaccinated. (Smallpox vaccination can protect against smallpox even after an</p>

exposure.) Only that quick, large-scale response prevented what could have been a full-blown recurrence of the once-extinct disease.

That's not our only close brush with the return of smallpox, a disease that [killed an estimated 300 million people](#) in the 20th century alone. Six unsecured smallpox vials [were discovered](#) sitting in a refrigerator in the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) in 2014, having been forgotten there for decades [among 327 vials of various diseases](#) and other substances. One of the vials had been compromised, the FDA found — thankfully not one of the ones containing smallpox or another deadly disease.

Other diseases have been at the center of similar lab mishaps. In March 2014, a Centers for Disease Control (CDC) researcher in Atlanta accidentally [contaminated](#) a vial of a fairly harmless bird flu with a far deadlier strain. The contaminated virus was then shipped to at least two different agricultural labs. One noticed the mistake when their [chickens sickened and died](#), while the other was not notified for more than a month.

The mistake was [communicated to CDC leadership](#) only when the CDC conducted [an extensive investigation in the aftermath of a different mistake](#) — the potential exposure of 75 federal employees to [live anthrax](#), after a lab that was supposed to inactivate the anthrax samples accidentally prepared activated ones.

After SARS emerged in 2003, there were six separate incidents of [SARS infections resulting from lab leaks](#). Meanwhile, last December, a [researcher in Taiwan caught Covid-19](#) at a moment when the island had been successfully suppressing outbreaks, going without a domestic case for more than a month. Retracing her steps, Taiwan authorities suspected she'd caught the virus from a bite by an infected mouse in a high-security biology lab.

“The fact is that laboratory accidents are not rare in life sciences,” former Senator Joe Lieberman told the bipartisan Commission on Biodefense [this March](#). “As countries throughout the world build additional laboratories to conduct research on highly infectious and deadly pathogens, it's clear that the pace of laboratory accidents will naturally increase.

According to [research published last year](#) by King's College London biosecurity researchers Gregory Koblentz and Filippa Lentzos, there are now nearly 60 labs classified as BSL-4 — the highest biosecurity rating, for labs authorized to carry out work with the most dangerous pathogens — either in operation, under construction, or planned in 23 different countries. At least 20 of those labs have been built in the last decade, and more than 75 percent are located in urban centers where a lab escape could quickly spread.

Alongside the near certainty that there will be more lab escapes in the future, engineering the viruses that could conceivably cause a pandemic if they escaped is getting cheaper and easier. That means it's now possible for a single lab or small group to conceivably cause mass destruction across the whole world, either deliberately or by accident.

“Potential large-scale effects of attempted bioterrorism have been mitigated in the past by terrorists' lack of expertise, and the inherent challenge of using biotechnology to make and release dangerous pathogens. Now, as people gain greater access to this technology and it becomes easier to use, the challenge is easing,” Pavel [argues](#). The result? “Incidents of bioterrorism soon will become more prevalent.”

Dangerous research and how to combat it

The BWC, which went into force in 1975, was the [first international treaty](#) to ban the production of an entire category of weapons of mass destruction.

Identifying or creating new bioweapons was made illegal for the 183 nations that are party to the treaty. The treaty also required nations to destroy or [make peaceful use](#) of any existing bioweapons. As then-President Richard Nixon [put it in 1969](#) when he announced the US would abandon any offensive bioweapons work of its own, “Mankind already carries in its own hands too many of the seeds of its own destruction.”

But the BWC is underfunded and little-prioritized despite the magnitude of the threat biological weapons pose. It has [just a few staff members](#) running its implementation support unit, compared to hundreds at the Chemical Weapons Convention, and a [budget smaller](#) than that of the [average McDonald's franchise](#). The US could easily bolster the BWC significantly with a relatively small funding commitment, and should absolutely do so.

And despite the treaty's broad aims, much of the work to identify dangerous pathogens that could potentially act as bioweapons is still ongoing — not as part of Cold War-era covert programs deliberately designed to create pathogens for military purposes, but through well-intentioned programs to study and learn about viruses that have the potential to cause the next pandemic. That means the Biological Weapons Convention does little to constrain much of the research that now poses the greatest risk of future biological weapons use, even if the release of those viruses would be entirely inadvertent.

One such type of science is what's called "[gain of function](#)" research, in which researchers make viruses more transmissible or more deadly in humans as part of studying how those viruses might evolve in the wild.

"I first heard about gain of function research in the 1990s, only then we had a different term for it: biological weapons research and development," Andy Weber, former assistant secretary of defense for nuclear, chemical & biological defense programs in the Obama administration and now a senior fellow at the Council on Strategic Risks, told me.

"The intent is 180 degrees off — NIH is trying to save the world from pandemics — but the content is almost entirely overlapping."

The status of gain of function research has been hotly contested over the last decade. In 2014, after the series of scary lab safety and containment failures I outlined above and after revelations of [alarming gain of function work on bird flu](#), the NIH, which funds much of the cutting-edge biology research worldwide, [imposed a moratorium](#) on gain of function work on pathogens with pandemic potential like influenza or SARS. But in 2017, the moratorium [was lifted](#) without much explanation.

Right now, the [US is funding gain of function](#) work at a few select laboratories, despite the [objections of many leading biologists](#) who argue that the very limited benefits of this work aren't worth the costs. In 2021, a bill was introduced to [prohibit federal research grants](#) that fund the gain of function research on SARS, MERS, and influenzas.

Beyond the risk that a virus strengthened through gain of function work might accidentally escape and trigger a larger outbreak — which is [one theory](#), albeit unproven, for how Covid-19 began — it can be hard to differentiate legitimate if risky research from deliberate efforts to create malign pathogens. "Because of our government support for this risky gain of function research, we've created the perfect cover for countries that want to do biological weapons research," Weber told me.

The No. 1 thing he'd recommend to prevent the next pandemic? "Ending government funding for risky research that plausibly could have caused this and future pandemics."

Another potentially risky area of virology research involves identifying animal species that act as reservoirs of viruses that have the potential to cross over into humans and cause a pandemic. Scientists involved in this work [go out to remote areas](#) to take samples of those pathogens with dangerous potential, bring them back to the lab, and determine whether they might be able to infect human cells. This is [precisely what researchers](#) at the WIV apparently did in the years leading up to Covid-19 as they searched for the animal source of the original SARS virus.

Such work was advertised as a way to prevent pandemic-capable pathogens from crossing over into humans, but it was largely useless when it came time to fight SARS-CoV-2, Weber says. "After having done this work for 15 years, I think there's little to show for it," Weber told me. That's not the [only](#)

[view](#) within the virology community, but it's not a rare one. Weber thinks Covid-19 should lead to a rethinking. "As the intelligence community concluded, it's plausible that it actually caused this pandemic. It was of zero help in preventing this pandemic or even predicting this pandemic."

There's certainly a place for work identifying viruses at the wildlife-human boundary and preventing spillover, but the limited track record of viral discovery work has many experts [questioning](#) whether our current approach to viral discovery is a good idea. They argue that the benefits have been overstated while the potential harms have been undercounted.

At every stage of the process, such research generates the possibility of causing the animal-human spillover that the scientists intend to study and prevent. And the end result — a detailed list of all of the pathogens that researchers have identified as incredibly dangerous if released — is a gift to biological weapons programs or to terrorists.

Thanks to improvements in DNA synthesis technology, once you have the digital RNA sequence for a virus, it's relatively straightforward to "print" the sequence and create your own copy of the virus (more on this below). These days, "there is no line between identifying a thing as pandemic capable and it becoming available as a weapon," Esvelt told me.

The good news? It shouldn't be hard for policymakers to change course on dangerous research.

The NIH [funds a large share](#) of biology research globally, and a renewed NIH ban on funding dangerous research would significantly reduce how much of that dangerous work takes place. If the US adopts firm and transparent policies against funding research into making pathogens deadlier or identifying pandemic-capable pathogens, it will be easier to exercise the global leadership needed to discourage that work in other countries.

"China funds this research too," Esvelt told me. It might be that, spooked by Covid-19, they're open to reconsidering, but "if we don't stop, it's going to be really hard to talk to China and get them to stop."

All of that amounts to a simple prescription for policymakers: Stop funding dangerous research, and then build the scientific and policy consensus necessary to get other nations to also stop funding such research.

Behind that simple prescription lies a great deal of complexity. Many discussions of whether the US should be funding dangerous research have run aground in technical arguments over [what counts as "gain of function" work](#) — as if the important thing is scientific terminology, not whether such research might trigger a pandemic that could kill millions of people.

"94% of countries have no national-level oversight measures for dual-use research, which includes national laws or regulation on oversight, an agency responsible for the oversight, or evidence of a national assessment of dual-use research," a 2021 [report](#) by the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security and Nuclear Threat Initiative found.

And if that were to happen, the result could be as bad or worse than anything nature can cook up. That's precisely what happens in a [pandemic simulation](#) put on in 2018 by the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security. In the fictional scenario, a terror group modeled on Aum Shinrikyo engineers a virus that combines the high transmissibility of parainfluenza — a family of viruses that generally cause mild symptoms in young children — with the extreme virulence of the Nipah virus. The result is a supervirus that in the exercise [eventually kills 150 million people around the world](#).

DNA synthesis and how it changes the bioweapons calculus

"Advances in synthetic biology and biotechnology make it easier than ever before to make pathogens more lethal and transmissible, and advances in the life sciences are occurring at a pace that governments have been unable to keep up with, which increases the risk of deliberate or accidental releases of dangerous pathogens," Lieberman [told](#) the bipartisan Commission on Biodefense in March.

One of the most exciting recent areas of progress in biology has been the increasing ease of DNA synthesis — the ability to [“print” DNA](#) (or RNA, which makes up the genetic material of viruses like influenzas, coronaviruses, measles, or polio) from a known sequence. It used to be that creating a specifically desired DNA sequence was incredibly expensive or impossible; now, it is much more [straightforward and relatively cheap](#), with multiple companies in the business of providing mail-order genes. While scientific skill is still very much required to produce a virus, it is nowhere near as expensive as it used to be, and can be done by a much smaller team.

This is great news; DNA synthesis enables a great deal of important and valuable biology research. But progress in DNA synthesis has been so fast that coordination against dangerous actors who might misuse it has lagged.

Furthermore, checking the sequence against a list of known dangerous sequences requires researchers to maintain a list of known dangerous sequences — which is itself something bad actors could use to cause harm. The result is an “information hazard,” what the existential risk scholar Nick Bostrom [defines](#) as “risks that arise from the dissemination or the potential dissemination of true information that may cause harm or enable some agent to cause harm.”

“DNA is an inherently dual-use technology,” James Diggans, who works on biosecurity at the industry-leading synthetic DNA provider Twist Bioscience, told me [in 2020](#). What that means is DNA synthesis makes fundamental biology research and lifesaving drug development go faster, but it can also be used to do research that can be potentially deadly for humanity.

That’s the conundrum that biosecurity researchers — in industry, in academia, and in the government — are faced with today: trying to figure out how to make DNA synthesis faster and cheaper for its many beneficial uses while ensuring every printed sequence is screened and hazards are appropriately handled.

If that sounds like a challenging problem now, it’s only likely to get worse in the future. As DNA synthesis gets ever cheaper and easier, many researchers anticipate the creation of [tabletop synthesizers](#) that would allow labs to simply print their own DNA as needed for their research, no middleman needed. Something like a tabletop synthesizer could make for awesome progress in biology — and worsen the challenge of preventing bad actors from printing out dangerous viruses.

Furthermore, as DNA synthesis gets cheaper, screening for dangerous sequences becomes a larger percentage of the cost, and so the financial advantage of cutting corners on screening could become bigger, as companies that don’t do screening may be able to offer considerably lower prices.

Esvelt and the team he works with — which includes US, EU, and Chinese researchers — have developed a framework for a potential solution. They want to maintain a database with hashes of deadly and dangerous sequences — mathematically generated strings that correspond uniquely to each sequence but can’t be reverse-engineered to learn the dangerous original sequence if you don’t already know it. That will allow checking sequences against a list of deadly ones without risking anyone’s privacy and intellectual property, and without maintaining a public list of deadly sequences that a terror group or bioweapons program could use as a shopping list.

“Later this year, we anticipate making DNA synthesis screening available for free to countries worldwide,” Esvelt told me.

To make things truly safe, such a proposal should be accompanied by government requirements that DNA synthesis companies send sequences on for screening against a certified database of dangerous sequences like Esvelt’s. But the hope is that such regulations will be welcomed if screening is secure, transparent, and free of charge to consumers — and that way, research can be made safer without slowing down progress on legitimate biology work.

International governance is always a difficult balancing act, and for many of these questions we’re going to need to keep revisiting our answers as we invent and improve new technologies. But we can’t afford to

wait. The omicron variant of Covid-19 [infected](#) tens of millions of people in the US in the space of just a few months. When a disease hits, it can hit fast, and it can be too late by the time we know we have a problem.

Thankfully, the risk of a serious catastrophe can be much reduced by our choices in advance, from screening programs to making deadly viruses harder to engineer to global efforts to end research into developing dangerous new diseases. But we have to actually take those steps, immediately and on a global basis, or all the planning in the world won't save us.

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HEADLINE	04/05 Overdo Covid vaccine boosters?
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/is-it-possible-to-overdo-it-with-covid-19-vaccine-boosters-what-is-and-isnt-known/
GIST	<p>First, it was one or two COVID-19 vaccine shots. Then it was get a booster shot after eight months, until they changed it to six, then five months. Now, federal health authorities have approved yet another shot four months from your last one if you're at least 50 or in poor health.</p> <p>But is it possible to overdo it on COVID-19 vaccine boosters? Could it end up like the overuse of antibiotics that medical experts now warn is breeding superbugs resistant to them?</p> <p>There's no evidence of that yet, most experts say. But the boosting-too-much questions are fueling a growing debate among scientists as an expert panel meets April 6 to advise the Food and Drug Administration on vaccine booster doses and updates tailored to emerging variants.</p> <p>Early this year, the European Medicines Agency's Head of Vaccines Strategy, Marco Cavaleri, raised the concern that excess boosting could weaken rather than strengthen our immunity.</p> <p>"If we have a strategy in which we give boosters every four months, we will end up potentially having problems with immune response," Cavaleri said at a Jan. 11 news briefing.</p> <p>Dr. Sarah Fortune, a professor at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health Department of Immunology and Infectious Diseases, told the German news organization Deutsche Welle a week later that Cavaleri likely was referring to possible exhaustion of the T cells that help protect the body from infection.</p> <p>"T cells become dysfunctional when they repeatedly see antigen in certain contexts," Fortune told Deutsche Welle. Vaccines introduce antigens to generate an immune response. But Fortune added that the studies on T cell exhaustion are based on HIV or cancer patients "where the antigen is there all the time, not just repeated vaccination."</p> <p>So far, there's been no indication that repeated vaccination weakens immunity or produces resistant viral strains.</p> <p>"I haven't seen any evidence to suggest that additional boosting would weaken protection or breed variants," said Holden T. Maecker, director of the Human Immune Monitoring Center at the Stanford University School of Medicine. "Our knowledge from immunology generally suggests no such weakening or overload, as long as immunizations are sufficiently separated in time."</p> <p>But others noted that much remains unclear.</p> <p>"We really don't know honestly," said Dr. Michael Daignault, an emergency physician at Providence Saint Joseph Medical Center in Burbank, who noted that the United States is relying on data from the second-booster program that Israel just started in January. "I know there's a lot of speculation, but there's no data on over-boosting."</p>

The COVID-19 vaccine booster intervals U.S. health officials are calling for have little precedent in public health. Many childhood immunizations are given in two to four shots from birth to six years of age. But apart from tetanus boosters every 10 years, they're done after that. Flu shots are given annually, tailored to the prevalent strain around the world.

But it's unclear whether some number of COVID-19 vaccine shots will deliver lasting protection, or whether it will require repeated boosting, and if so, how often? Cavaleri and other health officials have argued boosting multiple times a year is impractical and that vaccination efforts should focus on preventing severe illness rather than reducing mild "breakthrough" cases among the immunized.

Others like Dr. Bob Wachter, who chairs the medical department at UC San Francisco, have countered "there's a small but real risk" that a breakthrough case will lead to chronic "long COVID" illness and raise long-term risk of mental illness, cognitive decline and diabetes. He called the risk of getting over-boosted "theoretical" and urged those eligible for the second booster to "get the shot."

Is there a danger overuse could weaken the vaccines' effectiveness like with antibiotics?

There's no comparison to overuse of antibiotics, said Dr. Robert Quigley, an immunologist and cardiac surgeon in Pennsylvania who is the global medical director for International SOS, a firm that advises companies whose employees face medical issues traveling internationally.

"We're talking apples and oranges," Quigley said. "You can't extrapolate from the antibiotics to vaccines. The mechanisms of action are so unrelated and involve different fundamental scientific principles from one to the other."

Antibiotics kill or suppress growth of infectious bacteria, while vaccines use neutralized elements of disease-causing bacteria or viruses to trigger an immune response from your body.

Is there a benefit in waiting longer between boosters? The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently revised its guidance for the interval between the first two Pfizer and Moderna shots, based on experiences in Canada and the United Kingdom that a longer interval between the shots improved their effectiveness in preventing disease and reducing side effects.

But the CDC said the benefits peaked at eight weeks between shots — which Daignault noted is significantly less than the recommended four-month second booster interval.

Maecker said the booster intervals were based on evidence of waning immunity.

"I would say there's no reason to boost sooner than four to six months, just because there's no real benefit to a fully vaccinated person — immunity doesn't wane that quickly," Maecker said. "So to me, less than four months would be too soon. I think as long as people are not trying to boost too soon, the risk-benefit ratio is very favorable. I'm getting my boost on Sunday!"

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HEADLINE	04/04 Russia continues shelling hospitals
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/04/mykolaiv-hospital-shelling-damage-russia/
GIST	<p>MYKOLAIV, Ukraine – Mothers with newborn babies, a woman with a heart condition and elderly people who couldn't walk on their own hurriedly evacuated to the basement at a Mykolaiv hospital on Sunday night as the booming thuds of artillery drew closer.</p> <p>They made it down to shelter just in time. Five minutes after patients and staff had crowded into the cramped underground hallway, a suspected cluster munition landed right next to the building. The blast shattered nearly all of the windows.</p>

It made for an eventful first night for Bohdan, who was born in the makeshift bomb shelter after his mother, Vitalina, and others from the maternity ward made the most harrowing journey to safety, from the hospital's top floor.

"The Russians are animals; there's no other explanation," said Bohdan's grandmother Vlada. The family declined to provide their surnames out of concerns for their safety.

Vlada cried as she hugged her daughter and met Bohdan for the first time. He was sleeping with a pacifier in his mouth. Three other women and their babies were sitting on cots in the small room in the basement.

Hospitals in Ukraine are being battered by artillery and airstrikes with increasing frequency. The World Health Organization said that as of March 30, it had verified 82 incidents of attacks on health care since Russia invaded Ukraine, causing 72 deaths and 43 injuries.

At Mykolaiv's City Hospital No. 5, no one was injured in the attack. As nurses and volunteers moved from one ward to the next sweeping up broken glass, their feelings ranged from distress to anger. One staff member cried as she opened the door to what used to be her laboratory. The window glass was gone. The glass in the cabinets was shattered, too.

"Gosh, can this end already?" said Lyubov Byaluk, a nurse. "What did we even do? We never attacked anyone."

The heavy shelling throughout Mykolaiv on Sunday – which killed 10 people and injured 46, according to Mykolaiv Mayor Oleksandr Senkevych – comes as the war with Russia could be shifting more toward eastern and southern Ukraine. Moscow has pulled back its forces from areas north of Kyiv, but its military has continued heavy fighting in the eastern Donbas region and along the front line east of Mykolaiv.

Mykolaiv, near Ukraine's Black Sea shoreline, has been a key battleground: Ukrainian forces have held off Russian troops here, delaying any potential assault on Odessa, the country's largest port city, 70 miles southwest. But the Russians maintain a presence in the neighboring Kherson region, just 50 miles east.

Vitaliy Kim, governor of the Mykolaiv oblast, said at a news conference Monday that Russian projectiles have hit more than 2,000 buildings – including homes, hospitals and other health facilities. The strikes have killed at least 161 people, including six children, he said.

Kim said that the Russian attacks are an "attempt to scare" residents but that the situation was "under control." He said no military facilities had been hit. Last week, a missile hit a main government building in the city center, killing at least 36 people and injuring others.

The part of the Mykolaiv hospital farthest from where the shell landed suffered less damage, so some patients were moved to that wing. Others were evacuated to other hospitals. In the basement, one elderly woman lay on a mat on the floor. She had to be carried downstairs on Sunday night.

On a cot in the hallway was Liuba, who had come to the hospital with chest pains and heart trouble. She held up a fist to illustrate the condition of her heart now, after a night that she described as "very, very scary." Upstairs, her sons were helping with the considerable cleanup effort. Then she planned to go home, even if it was against the doctor's orders.

"I'm too scared to stay here or go to another hospital," she said.

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HEADLINE	04/05 Italy, Denmark expel Russia diplomats
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-expels-30-russian-diplomats-over-security-fears-2022-04-05/ https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/denmark-expels-15-russian-diplomats-after-bucha-reports-2022-04-05/

GIST	<p>ROME, April 5 (Reuters) - Italy has expelled 30 Russian diplomats because of security concerns, Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio said on Tuesday, and Russia was set to retaliate, according to TASS.</p> <p>A number of other Western governments have taken similar steps following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Italy summoned Russia's ambassador to the foreign ministry on Tuesday to tell him that the diplomats were being expelled.</p> <p>"The measure is in agreement with other European and Atlantic partners and is necessary for reasons linked to our national security and in the context of the current crisis caused by the unjustified aggression against Ukraine on the part of the Russian Federation," Di Maio said in a statement.</p> <p>Russia will give an appropriate response, TASS news agency quoted Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova as saying.</p> <p>COPENHAGEN, April 5 (Reuters) - Denmark said on Tuesday it would expel 15 Russian diplomats, in line with steps taken by other European Union countries, after reports of mass graves being found and of civilian killings in the Ukrainian town of Bucha.</p> <p>"This is another example of brutality, cruelty and war crimes, which apparently have taken place in Bucha," Danish Foreign Minister Jeppe Kofod told a press briefing.</p> <p>The move comes after several other European Union countries including France and Germany on Monday said they would expel Russian diplomats.</p> <p>Moscow, which claims images of executed civilians in Bucha were fake products of Ukrainian and Western propaganda aimed at discrediting Russia, said it would retaliate for the expulsion, RIA Novosti reported.</p> <p>The Danish foreign ministry said that it did not want to cut diplomatic ties to Moscow and that the Russian ambassador and the rest of the embassy were not part of the expulsion.</p> <p>The Danish Security and Intelligence Service said in a report earlier this year that the Russian embassy employed several intelligence officers involved in espionage.</p> <p>"We want to send a clear signal to Russia that espionage on Danish soil is unacceptable," Kofod said.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 Ukraine: Russia smugglers elude sanctions
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/russia-ukraine-smugglers-sanctions/2022/04/04/id/1064278/
GIST	<p>Russia is working with smugglers to establish supply routes for material that can't reach Russia because of Western sanctions, Ukrainian intelligence is claiming.</p> <p>The message from the Main Intelligence Directorate of Ukraine's Ministry of Defence explains that Russia, who has seen standard trade routes disrupted by sanctions, says Georgian authorities are colluding with smugglers to get the contraband around the embargo.</p> <p>"To avoid sanctions, Russian agents are working with the trade routes that go through Georgia," the intelligence report said. "The representatives of Georgian intelligence have received an order from the politicians in charge not to intervene with smugglers."</p> <p>The smuggled supplies are both of military and civilian nature, the message said.</p>

This claim comes in the context of heightened worries about Georgia's future as a potential hub for Russian capital, otherwise frozen out of Europe. Kelly C. Degnan, the U.S. ambassador to Georgia, sounded the alarm in a March 23 [interview](#) with Radio Free Liberty.

"Washington wouldn't want Georgia to be used as a 'black door' by companies and private individuals that want to avoid sanctions... We're watching this very closely" she added.

Russia and Georgia have a complicated history. The countries fought a 12-day war in August 2008, which led to the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia being recognized by Russia as "independent republics. No other European nation recognizes them.

Nevertheless, more than 35,000 Russian people fled to the country since the start of the war as well as several hundred registered businesses, [reported](#) investigative Ukrainian agency NV.

Additionally, the Georgian response to Russia's war has been mixed. Georgia is one of the few European countries that hesitated to join the imposition of sanctions against Russia, at one point completely rejecting the possibility.

However, on Thursday, the country's President Salome Zourabichvili pledged to join all of the sanctions and joint resolutions in a CNN [interview](#).

Yet, just days later, Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili said the country will not join economic sanctions against Russia.

"I want to explain this one more time. Implementing economic sanctions from Georgia is not an option," he [told](#) Newsgeorgia. "We, our team, are coming from the place of national security, from the place of defending the Georgia people."

Georgia, which has close banking ties with Russia, has been impacted by some of the sanctions directed at Russia's financial institutions. In particular, the Russian bank VTB, which has been cut off from the international SWIFT payment system, services a number of Georgian nationals.

The president and the prime minister seem to be in direct opposition, with no clarity in sight.

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HEADLINE	04/04 US cracks down Russia debt payments
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/debt/2022/04/04/id/1064295/
GIST	<p>Russia's latest sovereign bond coupon payments have been stopped, a source familiar with the matter and a spokeswoman for the U.S. Treasury said, putting it closer to a historic default.</p> <p>The latest sovereign bond coupon payments have not received authorization by the U.S. Treasury to be processed by correspondent bank JPMorgan, the source said.</p> <p>The payments were due on bonds due in 2022 and 2042.</p> <p>The correspondent bank processes the coupon payments from Russia, sending them to the payment agent to distribute to overseas bondholders.</p> <p>Previously, coupon payments on sovereign bonds had been processed, sources told Reuters.</p> <p>A U.S. Treasury spokeswoman also confirmed that certain payments were no longer being allowed.</p> <p>"Today is the deadline for Russia to make another debt payment," the spokeswoman said. "Beginning today, the U.S. Treasury will not permit any dollar debt payments to be made from Russian government</p>

	<p>accounts at U.S. financial institutions. Russia must choose between draining remaining valuable dollar reserves or new revenue coming in, or default."</p> <p>The country has a 30-day grace period to make the payment, the source said.</p> <p>Russia, which has a total of 15 international bonds outstanding with a face value of around \$40 billion, has managed to avoid defaulting on its international debt so far despite unprecedented Western sanctions. But the task is getting harder.</p> <p>If Russia fails to make any of its upcoming bond payments within their pre-defined timeframes, or pays in roubles where dollars, euros or another currency is specified, it will constitute a default.</p> <p>While Russia is not able to access international borrowing markets due to the West's sanctions, a default would prohibit it from accessing those markets until creditors are fully repaid and any legal cases stemming from the default are settled.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/05 World Bank: shocks drag Asia economies
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-covid-business-health-asia-5e484de40ef872ac726a3d77792324ef
GIST	<p>BANGKOK (AP) — Disruptions to supplies of commodities, financial strains and higher prices are among the impacts of the war in Ukraine that will slow economies in Asia in coming months, the World Bank says in a report released Tuesday.</p> <p>The report forecasts slower growth and rising poverty in the Asia-Pacific region this year as “multiple shocks” compound troubles for people and for businesses.</p> <p>Growth for the region is estimated at 5%, down from the original forecast of 5.4%. The “low case” scenario foresees growth dipping to 4%, it said. The region saw a rebound to 7.2% growth in 2021 after many economies experienced downturns with the onset of the pandemic.</p> <p>The World Bank anticipates that China, the region’s largest economy, will expand at a 5% annual pace, much slower than the 8.1% growth of 2021.</p> <p>Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has helped drive up prices for oil, gas and other commodities, eating into household purchasing power and burdening businesses and governments that already are contending with unusually high levels of debt due to the pandemic, the report said.</p> <p>The development lending institution urged governments to lift restrictions on trade and services to take advantage of more opportunities for trade and to end fossil fuel subsidies to encourage adoption of more green energy technologies.</p> <p>“The succession of shocks means that the growing economic pain of the people will have to face the shrinking financial capacity of their governments,” said the World Bank’s East Asia and Pacific Chief Economist Aaditya Mattoo. “A combination of fiscal, financial and trade reforms could mitigate risks, revive growth and reduce poverty.”</p> <p>The report pointed to three main potential shocks for the region: the war, changing monetary policy in the U.S. and some other countries and a slowdown in China.</p> <p>While rising interest rates make sense for cooling the U.S. economy and curbing inflation, much of Asia lags behind in its recovery from the pandemic. Countries like Malaysia may suffer outflows of currency and other financial repercussions from those changing policies, it said.</p>

	<p>Meanwhile, China's already slowing economy could falter as outbreaks of COVID-19 provoke lockdowns like the one now in place in Shanghai, the country's biggest megacity. That is likely to affect many Asian countries whose trade relies on demand from China.</p> <p>"These shocks are likely to magnify existing post-COVID difficulties," the report said. The 8 million households whose members fell back into poverty during the pandemic, "will see real incomes shrink even further as prices soar."</p> <p>The report noted that regional economies fared better during the 2021 Delta variant waves of coronavirus than in the initial months of the pandemic in 2020, largely because fewer restrictions were imposed and widespread vaccinations helped limit the severity of the outbreaks.</p> <p>On average, countries with a 1 percentage point higher vaccination rate had higher growth, it said.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/05 UN: 11M have fled homes in Ukraine
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-2022-midterm-elections-business-united-nations-europe-7d817e7e038f50b097489903a58041cf
GIST	<p>GENEVA — The U.N. migration agency now estimates that more than 11 million people have fled their homes in Ukraine since Russia's invasion.</p> <p>The International Organization for Migration, in its first such full assessment in three weeks, reported Tuesday that more than 7.1 million had been displaced within Ukraine as of April 1. That comes on top of the figure of more than 4 million who have fled abroad, reported by the U.N. refugee agency.</p> <p>IOM said more than 2.9 million others are actively considering "leaving their place of habitual residence due to war."</p> <p>Ukraine had a pre-war population of 44 million.</p> <p>The tally marked an increase from IOM's tally in mid-March of more than 9.7 million displaced internally in Ukraine or driven abroad.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 Saudi Arabia hikes oil prices higher
SOURCE	https://finance.yahoo.com/news/saudi-arabia-hikes-oil-prices-124131506.html
GIST	<p>(Bloomberg) -- Saudi Arabia raised oil prices for customers in all regions as Russia's invasion of Ukraine continues to reverberate through markets.</p> <p>State producer Saudi Aramco increased its Arab Light crude for next month's shipments to Asia to \$9.35 a barrel above the benchmark it uses. That's a jump of \$4.40 a barrel from April, when the key grade was already at a record. The move was roughly in line with a Bloomberg survey of traders and refiners last week.</p> <p>Oil has soared to more than \$100 a barrel in the wake of Moscow's attack, which has roiled financial markets across the world. Many buyers are avoiding cargoes from Russia, despite them being offered a steep discounts. Flows from the country may be down by between 1 and 3 million barrels a day through the third quarter, according to Vitol Group, the world's biggest independent crude trader.</p> <p>Aramco made its decision after OPEC+ on Thursday opted to continue raising output only gradually. The 23-nation group, led by Saudi Arabia and Russia, has resisted calls from major importers including the U.S. to accelerate production increases and bring down global fuel prices.</p>

	<p>"It's a massive increase," said Giovanni Staunovo, a commodity analyst at UBS Group AG. "Extra volumes from Saudi Arabia will only come at a high price."</p> <p>The Saudi hike -- likely to set the tone for other Middle Eastern producers such as Iraq and Kuwait -- comes despite a spate of virus lockdowns in China, the top oil importer.</p> <p>Aramco raised other Asian grades by at least \$2.70 a barrel, while all U.S. prices were increased by \$2.20. U.S. Arab light will jump to a premium of \$5.65 a barrel, also a record.</p> <p>More than 60% of Saudi Arabia's oil shipments go to Asia, with China, Japan, South Korea and India being the biggest buyers. The kingdom is the world's biggest crude exporter and produced 10.3 million barrels a day last month.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/05 Tornadoes, severe storms threaten South
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/05/weather/tornado-hail-severe-storm-south-tuesday-wxn/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)Parts of the South are once again under the threat of severe weather this week, with tornadoes, damaging winds and hail possible Tuesday from Louisiana to North Carolina.</p> <p>A tornado watch is in effect until 11 a.m. CT for eastern Louisiana, western Mississippi and southeastern Arkansas, the National Weather Service's Storm Prediction Center said.</p> <p>Severe storms moving through the region may produce tornadoes, wind gusts up to 75 mph and large hail, forecasters said. Cities in the watch area include New Orleans and Jackson, Mississippi.</p> <p>Flash flood warnings were also issued overnight for the Dallas area, where between 1 to 3 inches of rain had already fallen and another 2 inches was possible.</p> <p>"Be especially cautious at night when it is harder to recognize the dangers of flooding," the NWS Fort Worth office said.</p> <p>Four people were rescued from fast-moving floodwaters in McKinney, Texas, about 30 miles north of Dallas, Monday night, officials said. The McKinney Fire Department said on Twitter it carried out three separate water rescues. No one was injured.</p> <p>The line of severe weather is the latest in a series of storms that have battered the southern US for three weeks straight.</p> <p>The first system spawned a deadly EF-3 tornado just outside New Orleans and 25 tornadoes in Texas last month.</p> <p>Bill Bunting of the Storm Prediction Center told CNN weather systems can fall into repetitive cycles.</p> <p>"The atmosphere has a fairly chaotic component to it, but it does occasionally get into patterns where we see this repeatability. We've seen it in all seasons," said Bunting. "Unfortunately, for this past month, and certainly for the week ahead, the threat for severe weather is going to be present again, in many of the same areas that have already seen enough severe weather just over the past four weeks."</p> <p>The very moist air flowing northward from the Gulf of Mexico, which has helped the storms develop over the last few weeks, is once again what we will see this week," Bunting said.</p> <p>When to expect the worst conditions</p> <p>The storm will bring a wave of severe conditions to different parts of the South throughout the day Tuesday, CNN meteorologist Robert Shackelford said. Tornadoes, damaging winds and hail are the main threats.</p>

	<p>Here's the expected timing of the worst conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jackson, Mississippi, will see severe storms begin around 5 a.m. and they will continue through about 10:30 a.m. • Cities from Nashville to Montgomery, Alabama, will see severe storms begin around 8 a.m. and last until around 1:30 p.m. • Atlanta will see the threat of severe conditions increase around 1:30 p.m. and last through 5 p.m. • A wide swath of cities in a comma shape from Charlotte and Wilmington, North Carolina, to Colombia and Charleston in South Carolina, and swinging around to Savannah, Georgia, and Panama City, Florida, are expected to see the worst conditions from 6 p.m. through 10 p.m. <p>By Wednesday, a separate system will form, bringing another round of storms to the South and extending the severe threat for another day.</p> <p>"A second system develops on the heels of the first as an upper trough deepens strongly and digs down across the central Plains and eventually the Deep South," said the NWS office in Atlanta.</p> <p>By Thursday, the threat diminishes, as the storms push off the East Coast. While the system is primarily bringing storms to the South, we will still see rain Thursday for much of the Eastern Seaboard.</p> <p>Anywhere from Florida to New England will see rain, so we could see a few travel delays at some major airports Wednesday, and again Thursday, as this system moves through.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 BLM leaders used donations buy mansion
SOURCE	https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2022/04/black-lives-matter-6-million-dollar-house.html
GIST	<p>On a sunny day late last spring, three leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement — Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Melina Abdullah — sat around a table on the patio of an expensive house in Southern California. The women were recording a YouTube video to mark the first anniversary of George Floyd's murder, and they discussed their racial-justice work and the difficulties they had faced over the year.</p> <p>"For me, the hardest moments have been the right-wing-media machine just leveraging literally all its weight against me, against our movement, against BLM the organization," Cullors said. "I'm some weeks out now from a lot of the noise, so I have more perspective, right? While I was in it, I was in survival mode." She was referring to an April 2021 article in the New York <i>Post</i> that revealed her purchase of four homes for nearly \$3 million. The disclosures had contributed to the idea that there is a disturbing gap between the fortunes of the movement's most visible figures and on-the-ground activists across the country, and Cullors resigned as executive director of Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation on May 27, within a few days of the patio chat.</p> <p>"I think they've <i>attempted</i> to cancel us, but they have not been <i>successful</i> in canceling us," Abdullah said at another point in the conversation. "They've attempted to say — and I'm just gonna say it — 'She bought some damn houses. We gonna cancel her.'" Garza cut in with a comment seemingly addressed to critics: "Y'all don't know shit about what it takes to live in a box here."</p> <p>None of the women acknowledged the house behind them. It's far from a box, with more than 6,500 square feet, more than half a dozen bedrooms and bathrooms, several fireplaces, a soundstage, a pool and bungalow, and parking for more than 20 cars, according to real-estate listings. The California property was purchased for nearly \$6 million in cash in October 2020 with money that had been donated to BLMGNF.</p> <p>The transaction has not been previously reported, and Black Lives Matter's leadership had hoped to keep the house's existence a secret. Documents, emails, and other communications I've seen about the luxury property's purchase and day-to-day operation suggest that it has been handled in ways that blur, or cross, boundaries between the charity and private companies owned by some of its leaders. It creates the</p>

impression that money donated to the cause of racial justice has been spent in ways that benefit the leaders of Black Lives Matter personally.

On March 30, I asked the organization questions about the house, which is known internally as “Campus.” Afterward, leaders circulated an internal strategy memo with possible responses, ranging from “Can we kill the story?” to “Our angle — needs to be to deflate ownership of the property.” The memo includes bullet points explaining that “Campus is part of cultural arm of the org — potentially as an ‘influencer house,’ where abolition+ based content is produced by artists & creatives.” Another bullet is headed “Accounting/990 modifications” and reads in part: “need to first make sure it’s legally okay to use as we plan to use it.” The memo also describes the property as a “safehouse” for leaders whose safety has been threatened. The two notions — that the house is simultaneously a confidential refuge and a place for broadcasting to the widest possible audience — are somewhat in tension. The memo notes: “Holes in security story: Use in public YT videos.”

In an emailed statement on April 1, Shalomyah Bowers, a BLMGNF board member, said that the organization bought Campus “with the intention for it to serve as housing and studio space for recipients of the Black Joy Creators Fellowship.” The fellowship, which “provides recording resources and dedicated space for Black creatives to launch content online and in real life focused on abolition, healing justice, urban agriculture and food justice, pop culture, activism, and politics,” was announced the following morning.

Bowers also said in the statement that BLMGNF had “always planned” to disclose the house in legal filings this May, that it does not serve as anyone’s personal residence, and that purchasing property via private LLCs is customary in real estate as a way of protecting assets from litigation and liability. The statement did not address why, if the house was primarily intended to be a creative space, relatively little content has been produced there over the course of 17 months.

Even if everything about the house is above board, the general air of secrecy is out of step with the transparency that is expected of charitable or tax-exempt organizations. The size of the acquisition could expose the group to criticism. “That’s a very legitimate critique,” says Jacob Harold, a former CEO of GuideStar and the co-founder of Candid, an information service that reports on nonprofits. “It’s not a critique that says what you’re doing is illegal or even unethical; it might just be unstrategic. Why aren’t you spending it on policy or, you know, other strategies that an organization might take to address the core issues around Black Lives Matter?”

Even an appearance of impropriety or mismanagement threatens to deter donors and harm the larger movement for racial equity. On this score, some of the harshest criticism of BLMGNF has come from within. Internal emails dating to 2016 show activists voicing concern about how donations were being spent and how the organization was being run, and frustrations only continued to mount. In the fall of 2020, ten city chapters issued a public statement rebuking the global network for its opacity, and the families of some Black victims of police violence have complained that they have seen little of the funds that have flowed to the movement’s most visible facet.

George Floyd’s death triggered an outpouring of contributions to BLMGNF, and in October 2020, the organization received an infusion of \$66.5 million from its fiscal sponsor — an intermediary commonly used by fledgling nonprofits to process donations. Two weeks later, a man named Dyane Pascall purchased the seven-bedroom house that would become known as Campus. According to California business-registration documents, Pascall is the financial manager for Janaya and Patrisse Consulting, an LLC run by Cullors and her spouse, Janaya Khan; Pascall is also the chief financial officer for Trap Heals, a nonprofit led by Damon Turner, the father of Cullors’s only child.

Within a week, Pascall transferred ownership of the house to an LLC established in Delaware by the law firm Perkins Coie. The maneuver ensured that the ultimate identity of the property’s new owner was not disclosed to the public. After the transfer, Black Lives Matter leaders began using the house in various ways, including as a set for recording videos and staying overnight when they didn’t feel safe at their own homes. The property’s upkeep — cleaning, pool maintenance, security — has been handled by a loose

mixture of people working for BLMGNF, Janaya and Patrisse Consulting, the Bowers Consulting Firm, or other entities. Bowers, who also serves as BLMGNF's deputy executive director, has in the past overseen payments to Trap Heals from entities that Cullors leads, including an \$86,000 fee from a nonprofit called Reform LA Jails and a nearly \$150,000 fee from the Black Lives Matter Political Action Committee.

On the secure-messaging platform Signal, in a text chat named "BLM Security Hub," around two dozen participants from BLMGNF, Bowers Consulting, Janaya and Patrisse Consulting, and various other organizations and companies commingle. One conversation from June 2021 — after Cullors announced her resignation — concerns her assistant confronting a man who had been found snooping around the premises. Paul Cullors, Patrisse's brother, whose title is head of physical security, updated the group on the situation. Earlier entries in the Signal chat show him performing the same role for properties Cullors purchased with her own funds, which she has [said](#) came from book and media deals. Other internal records indicate Cullors's mother was approved for a cleaning job at Campus and that Cullors's sister signed the same kind of nondisclosure agreement as other employees at the property, although it's not clear if the sister worked there.

Cullors has also used the Campus house in ways that are probably not in line with what Black Lives Matter donors intended for their dollars. Back in April 2021, Cullors uploaded a [video](#) to her personal YouTube channel titled "I Try Baking a Family Recipe for the FIRST Time *INTENSE*" — the first in an intended series called *Patrisse Tries*, in which she would attempt unfamiliar tasks. In the nearly 13-minute clip, she prepares a peach cobbler with her aunt at the Campus kitchen island, making use of its soapstone countertops and high-end appliances. (Other videos from Cullors's personal YouTube channel also appear to match images of the house's interior shown in real-estate listings.) It's an example of how Cullors acted as both the head of BLMGNF and cultivated a lucrative public profile at the same time; when she quit the organization, she said it was to focus on media deals she'd signed with a book publisher and Warner Bros. (A lawyer for Cullors declined to comment on the record.)

Nonprofit experts say that any apparent intermingling of resources among BLMGNF, Cullors, and outside entities might jeopardize the charity's tax-exempt status. Lloyd Hitoshi Mayer, a professor at the University of Notre Dame Law School who specializes in nonprofits, said the details of the house's management deserve closer scrutiny. If there are problems with the group's tax filings, there could be civil and criminal liabilities for the people and organizations involved. He said that investigations by state and federal agencies could be warranted. "They're all indicators that the money may not be going where it's supposed to be going," he says.

Other conversations on the BLM Security Hub chat show efforts to monitor social media for negative mentions of BLMGNF, with members using their influence with the platforms to have such remarks removed. It's currently not possible to share the *Post*'s article on Cullors's home purchases on Facebook because the site's parent company, Meta, has labeled the content "abusive." At other points, Bowers and his associates direct a private investigator to look into BLMGNF detractors and journalists, including me. BLMGNF was awarded tax-exempt status from the IRS in December 2020, two months after the house's purchase. The distinction meant the group would have to disclose information about donors and expenditures in an annual filing known as a 990. But BLMGNF has not submitted those forms for 2020 or 2021. It also has problems at the state level: The Washington *Examiner* reported in February 2022 that California's attorney general told the group it was considered delinquent. BLMGNF has since retained the high-profile Democratic lawyer Marc Elias and maneuvered to get more time to formally submit data from 2020 by switching from calendar-year to fiscal-year tracking. In the meantime, contributions to the group have been essentially shut down. AmazonSmile suspended the organization from its platform in February 2022, and BLMGNF has removed donation links from its own website.

The group informally released a batch of financial information in February 2021, when it said it had taken in more than \$90 million in 2020 and still had \$60 million on hand. The house was not mentioned. Soon after the report, local activists went public with complaints that they felt unsupported by BLMGNF despite their pleas for help. Two mothers who lost their sons to police violence demanded the organization stop using their names to raise funds.

Real-estate purchases have been a problem for the BLMGNF outside of the U.S. as well. In the summer of 2021, BLM Canada announced that it was purchasing a mansion in Toronto and hoped to establish a Black community hub. Conservative-media outlets later reported that public-property records indicated the transaction involved a transfer of approximately \$6.3 million to a Canadian nonprofit, M4BJ, that was established in part by Janaya Khan, who was born in Toronto. Two BLM Toronto organizers released a resignation letter expressing their frustrations. “We have written this because our many attempts to bring up concerns were met with denial, gaslighting, and a refusal to acknowledge requests for accountability,” the organizers said. “We were told that concerns about financial transparency and community accountability were rumours, ‘not a big deal,’ and whispers from so-called ‘counter-organizers.’”

Tory Russell, a prominent activist in Ferguson, Missouri, said that he felt depressed when he learned about about the California property. “It’s a waste of resources,” he said. While Black Lives Matter at the national level is flush, he’s seen local activists fall into poverty and become homeless. Last year, Russell put out a video with Michael Brown Sr., whose son was killed by a police officer in August 2014, demanding money from BLMGNF to help people living in Ferguson, and he’s since been struggling to raise \$1.2 million for a community center. “They shouldn’t be walking around no Black people, no Black communities,” he said of the organization’s leaders. “They should be somewhere in shame.”

In the patio video marking the anniversary of George Floyd’s death, the conversation among Cullors, Garza, and Abdullah turned to the people who have faulted their leadership online. “Who the fuck are you? You ain’t done shit,” Abdullah said. Garza added that she discounted criticism from people she didn’t know personally. “I don’t need to be accountable to you,” she said. “I don’t know what accountability looks like with people that I don’t know and have never talked to.”

Cullors told the women at the table, “My therapist told me, she said, ‘What you’ve been through, most people would not survive’ ... And I don’t feel like I’m just surviving. I feel like I’m really thriving.”

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HEADLINE	04/04 April: Emergency Communications Month
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/federal-pages/dhs/cisa-officially-designates-april-as-emergency-communications-month/
GIST	<p>Today, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) kicks off its inaugural Emergency Communications Month. Through its emergency communications mission, CISA supports and promotes the ability of emergency response providers across the nation to communicate in the event of a natural disaster, terrorist act, or other hazard. CISA also provides various resources and guidance for stakeholders to establish emergency communications infrastructure and protocols.</p> <p>“At CISA, our Emergency Communications mission is focused on ensuring that emergency response providers and critical partners can communicate across jurisdictions, disciplines, and every level of government to protect our homeland during time of crisis,” said CISA Director Jen Easterly. “To highlight the critical role of emergency communications, we are officially designating April as Emergency Communications Month. To all of the emergency communicators out there, the folks who are on the front lines every day, we are proud to be your partner and teammate. Thank you for everything you do to keep us all safer.”</p> <p>CISA’s emergency communications mission was established in 2007 in response to the communications challenges faced during 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina. This mission has only grown in importance. CISA provides resources to support our government and industry partners to help them build up and strengthen their emergency communications capabilities.</p> <p>Throughout the month, CISA will highlight the role of emergency communications in CISA’s mission, the role of cybersecurity in emergency communications, and the role our partnerships and stakeholders play in helping the agency achieve its goals.</p>

	To learn more about Emergency Communications Month and how to amplify our resources, visit cisa.gov/emergency-communications-month .
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HEADLINE	04/01 Report: 102 firefighters died on duty 2020
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/federal-pages/dhs/report-102-firefighters-died-on-duty-in-2020-including-36-covid-19-deaths/
GIST	<p>Since 1976, the USFA has tracked the number of firefighter fatalities and conducted an annual analysis. Through the collection of information on the causes of firefighter deaths, the USFA can focus on specific problems and direct efforts toward finding solutions to reduce the number of firefighter fatalities in the future. This information is also used to measure the effectiveness of current programs directed toward firefighter health and safety. Several programs have been developed by the USFA in response to this annual report. For example, the USFA sponsors research to create safer operational environments for firefighters by increasing awareness about emergency vehicle operations safety, health and safety of the female emergency responder, fire service risk management, fire station safety, and roadway incident safety. The data developed for this report are also widely used in other firefighter fatality prevention efforts.</p> <p>In addition to performing this analysis, the USFA, working in partnership with the NFFF, develops a list of all on-duty firefighter fatalities and associated documentation each year. If certain criteria are met, the fallen firefighter's next of kin, as well as members of the individual's fire department, are invited by the NFFF to the annual National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Service. The service is held at the National Emergency Training Center (NETC) in Emmitsburg, Maryland, during National Fire Prevention Week in October of each year. The 40th Annual National Fallen Firefighters Memorial Weekend was held Oct. 2-3, 2021, and families who lost loved ones in 2019 and 2020 were invited to attend the ceremony.</p> <p>An on-duty fatality includes any injury or illness that was sustained while on duty and proves fatal. The term "on duty" refers to being involved in operations at the scene of an emergency, whether it is a fire or nonfire incident; responding to or returning from an incident; performing other officially assigned duties, such as training, maintenance, public education, inspection, investigations, court testimony or fundraising; and being on call, under orders or on standby duty (except at the individual's home or place of business). An individual who experiences a heart attack or other fatal injury at home while they prepare to respond to an emergency is considered on duty when the response begins. A firefighter who becomes ill while performing fire department duties and suffers a heart attack shortly after arriving home (or at another location) may be considered on duty since the inception of the heart attack occurred while the firefighter was on duty.</p> <p>102 firefighters died in 2020 from injuries sustained while on duty. This is 37 more than the 2019 total of 65 firefighter fatalities. The 2020 total includes 10 firefighters who died under circumstances that were part of inclusion criteria changes resulting from the Hometown Heroes Survivors Benefit Act. It also includes 36 firefighters who died from complications of COVID-19. When not including these fatalities, there were 56 firefighter fatalities in 2020 that were non-Hometown Hero and did not occur as a result of complications relating to COVID-19.</p> <p>An analysis of multiyear firefighter fatality numbers and trends needs to acknowledge the changes from the December 2003 Hometown Heroes Survivors Benefit Act as well as the inclusion of fatalities that occurred due to complications of COVID-19. As a result, some figures and tables in this report may not include the Hometown Heroes and COVID-19 fatalities in the total or may separate them. This does not, however, diminish the sacrifices made by any firefighter who dies while on duty, or the sacrifices made by their family and peers.</p> <p>In 2020, firefighter fatalities included 49 career firefighters, 44 volunteer firefighters, and 9 part-time or full-time members of wildland or wildland contract fire agencies. The gender of the firefighters who died</p>

	while on duty in 2020 consisted of 1 female and 101 males. The 102 deaths in 2020 resulted from a total of 99 fatal incidents, including 3 multiple firefighter fatality incidents taking the lives of 6 firefighters. In 2020, 13 firefighters were killed during activities involving brush, grass or wildland firefighting. This total includes part-time and seasonal wildland firefighters, full-time wildland firefighters, and municipal or volunteer firefighters whose deaths are related to a wildland fire.
Return to Top	Read the U.S. Fire Administration report

HEADLINE	04/04 Capitol attack panel scores 2 big wins
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/apr/04/capitol-attack-panel-inches-closer-to-trump-inner-circle
GIST	<p>The House select committee investigating the January 6 Capitol attack is moving to capitalize on new momentum as it embarks on its final push to complete the roughly one hundred remaining depositions and conclude the evidence-gathering phase of the inquiry.</p> <p>The panel has scored two major wins in recent days: more than six hours of testimony from Donald Trump's son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner, and a conclusion by a federal judge that the former president likely committed felonies to overturn the 2020 election.</p> <p>Members on the select committee believe Kushner's cooperation might prompt other Trump officials to assist the investigation as the panel inches closer to Trump's inner circle and the former president himself, according to sources familiar with the matter.</p> <p>The panel has also been buoyed by the federal court ruling that said Trump "more likely than not" violated the law over 6 January, reaffirming the purpose of the investigation and making it harder for Trump's allies to defy the inquiry, the sources said.</p> <p>And members on the select committee believe that opening contempt of Congress proceedings against the Trump aides Peter Navarro and Dan Scavino for ignoring their subpoenas, will reinforce the message that the panel will punish non-compliance, the sources said.</p> <p>"There's a momentum to this process when there's cooperation," Jamie Raskin, one of the congressmen on the panel, said of the burst of recent activity. "When people see that others are doing the right thing, it gives them the courage to do the right thing."</p> <p>The select committee has now conducted more than 800 depositions and interviews, obtained almost 90,000 documents and followed up on more than 435 tips received through the tip line on its website, since it started its work in earnest last August.</p> <p>House investigators also have more than 100 depositions remaining on the schedule, the sources said, including one with a key witness who is expected to reveal connections between the Oath Keepers and the Proud Boys militia groups and the Capitol attack.</p> <p>That deposition – slated for 5 April – would represent another breakthrough and could play a big role in establishing for the select committee whether Trump oversaw a criminal conspiracy as part of his efforts to overturn the 2020 election.</p> <p>It is so crucial, the sources said, since it could form part of the evidence to connect the militia groups that stormed the Capitol to the organizers of the rallies that immediately preceded the attack – who in turn are slowly being linked to the Trump White House.</p> <p>But that testimony has been on the books for several weeks, and the greater challenge for the select committee remains to resolve ongoing cooperation talks with Rudy Giuliani, Trump's one-time attorney, and Ivanka Trump, the former president's daughter.</p>

The select committee has a special interest in Giuliani since he was in close contact with Trump as he oversaw the implementation of the scheme to have the then vice-president, Mike Pence, stop the certification of Joe Biden's election win and return Trump to office.

The Guardian [first reported](#) that Giuliani was poised to cooperate with the investigation and reveal the roles played by Republican members of Congress with caveats – such as not discussing matters covered by executive privilege – that are not yet resolved.

House investigators have also identified Ivanka Trump as a key person of interest since she appeared to have learned before 6 January that the scheme to have Pence stop the certification was unlawful – but and might shed light on why the former president still went ahead with the plan.

Testimony that speaks to whether Trump knew what he was pressing Pence to do was unlawful – and when he knew it – is a central question for the panel as it seeks to establish whether Trump's actions should warrant a criminal referral to the justice department.

The panel has also privately noted in recent days that Ivanka Trump might be able to shed light on who Trump was calling from the White House as the Capitol attack unfolded, after call logs from that day showed a near eight-hour gap in communications.

The Guardian [has revealed](#) at least one of Trump's phone calls on 6 January – when he dialed the Republican senator Mike Lee trying to reach Senator Tommy Tuberville – was routed through an official White House phone and should have been in the call logs but was not.

As the select committee moves towards wrapping up the evidence-gathering phase of the investigation, the hope among its members is that the recent momentum will carry the inquiry through to public hearings that are now expected to start in mid-May.

The panel remains undecided whether to demand cooperation from Ginni Thomas, the wife of the supreme court justice Clarence Thomas, after the Washington Post and CBS reported she pressed Trump's former chief of staff Mark Meadows in texts to overturn the 2020 election.

The issue centers on the fact that several members on the select committee [did not know about Thomas's texts](#) – turned over by Meadows months ago – until news reports brought them to public attention, according to two sources familiar with the matter.

Some members wanted to call her in to ask her about the texts, but others who had discussed the issue months ago demurred, arguing that Thomas, a far-right activist, was unlikely to assist the panel and would try to turn the inquiry into a political circus.

A spokesperson for the panel did not respond to a request for comment.

The select committee [may yet request cooperation from Thomas](#), but House investigators are pursuing myriad lines of inquiry and whether to ask her for voluntary assistance or demand documents and testimony pursuant to a subpoena is just one strand, the sources said.

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HEADLINE	04/04 Law enforcement access your data?
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/apr/04/us-law-enforcement-agencies-access-your-data-apple-meta
GIST	A brazen hack that exposed consumer data collected by Apple and the Facebook-parent company Meta has raised fresh questions about how secure our data is in the hands of tech companies and how easily law enforcement can get hold of the information big tech collects.

It was revealed last week that hackers obtained the information of some [Apple](#) and Meta users by forging an emergency legal request, one of several mechanisms by which law enforcement agencies can request or demand that tech companies hand over data such as location and subscriber information.

Lawmakers and privacy advocates argued the forgery was a warning sign that the system is in need of reform. “No one wants tech companies to refuse legitimate emergency requests,” but the current system has “clear weaknesses”, [Senator Ron Wyden](#) said in a statement following the hack.

A review of the myriad ways tech companies share consumer data with law enforcement agencies reveals that it’s often fairly straightforward for such bodies to get their hands on consumer data. “[Your data is] pretty much all available to the government in one form or another,” said Jennifer Lynch, the surveillance litigation director at the digital rights group the Electronic Frontier Foundation.

“One of the real challenges with technology these days is that it is next to impossible to figure out exactly all the data that companies are collecting on us and to exert any kind of control over what happens to that data,” added Lynch.

An emergency legal request, like the one the hackers forged, for instance, doesn’t require a subpoena or warrant, unlike many other legal requests. It’s supposed to be reserved for exceptional situations: Apple [considers](#) legal requests an “emergency” if “it relates to circumstance(s) involving imminent and serious threat(s) to: 1) the life/safety of individual(s); 2) the security of a State; 3) the security of critical infrastructure/installation”. But, as the hackers have shown, it can be easily exploited.

Apple and [Meta](#) did not respond to a request for comment.

Here are some of the main ways law enforcement can get hold of your data.

Accessing your device

Perhaps the most obvious way law enforcement can get your data is by accessing your physical device. Police can subpoena your device or get a search warrant to go through your phones. If your phone is locked or you only use encrypted messaging apps, police can use mobile device forensic tools to break the encryption or bypass your lock screens if they are armed with a warrant.

In [February 2021](#), a US appeals court ruled that Customs and Border Protection (CBP) can freely search your devices without a warrant at the borders. The move created “a massive loophole to target anyone traveling into or out of the US”, said Albert Fox Cahn, the founder of the privacy advocacy firm Surveillance Technology Oversight Project.

Law enforcement requests

If you scan privacy policies of your most used apps you’ll probably find a clause or two that says something along the lines of “we don’t share your user data ever unless it’s in [response to a law enforcement request](#)”. That means police, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (Ice), the FBI and other law enforcement agencies can get your user data directly from tech companies through various forms of legal requests, without having to search your device. Sometimes, they can get it just by asking for it.

Google, for example, received more than 39,000 requests for user information between July and December 2020, according to the company’s most recent [transparency report](#). Google handed over user info in response to more than 80% of those requests, affecting the accounts of more than 89,000 users.

In many cases these requests come with gag orders, meaning the company cannot notify users that their information has been requested for six months or more. Sometimes it will be years before a user finds out their information has been handed over to law enforcement.

There are a handful of different types of law enforcement requests, some more sweeping than others and some carrying more legal weight. Three types of legal requests in particular have recently sparked concern among activists and experts: geofence warrants, keyword search warrants and administrative subpoenas.

A keyword search warrant allows law enforcement to access the information of anyone who searched for certain terms or keywords within a certain time period.

A geofence warrant allows law enforcement agencies to seek the device information of all the users who were at a certain place at a certain time. Google, the only company that currently discloses the number of geofence warrants it receives, said it fielded a little under 3,000 in the last quarter of 2020.

Both types of warrants, privacy experts say, are over-[broad and thus violate the constitutional protection](#) against unreasonable searches. While many warrants typically seek the information of a single person or group of people who are suspected of a crime, geofence and keyword search warrants work backwards and cast a wide net hoping to narrow down a list of suspects.

It's not unlike [cell-tower dumps](#), for which law enforcement agencies ask cellphone companies for the information of all people who were connected to a cell tower in the vicinity of a crime scene at the time the crime was suspected to have occurred.

A [federal judge in Virginia](#) recently ruled that local authorities violated the constitution when using a geofence warrant to investigate a 2019 robbery, setting a precedent that attorneys representing people caught up in these types of searches could use to receive remedies for being falsely suspected or accused of a crime.

Administrative subpoenas carry less legal weight than other requests: law enforcement agencies don't need a judge to sign off on them but they also aren't self-enforcing. The only way the agencies can force a company to hand over the data demanded in the request is by taking them to court after they refuse to comply. Still, companies will often comply with the request even though it is not a court-ordered subpoena. [Some experts have expressed concern of the use of this type of request by Ice](#), which has requested user data from tech companies like Google, fearing the agency is using them to expand its surveillance on US citizens. An Ice official [previously](#) said the agency does not often send administrative subpoenas to tech companies for non-criminal purposes. In a press release, Ice said it "uses statutorily-authorized immigration subpoenas to obtain information as part of investigations regarding potential removable aliens".

Google did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Data brokers

There is an entire industry of companies and firms that buy and sell your data for a profit. The [shadowy network of data brokers](#) operates fairly under the radar but often provides easy access to user data such as your location and purchase history to other entities, including law enforcement.

Data brokers can collect your personal data from a handful of different sources, such as your social media profiles, public records and other commercial sources or companies. Some data brokers integrate directly into apps to Hoover up information like location and purchase history. These brokers, which can include some telecommunications companies and credit reporting agencies, then sell that raw data, or inferences and analysis based on that data, to other companies and government agencies.

It's not always clear whether a data broker has collected or sold your information. In fact, recently data broker X Mode, whose customers include military contractors, was exposed for buying location data from the [Muslim prayer app Muslim Pro](#) without the knowledge of users of the app.

Surveillance tech companies

Law enforcement agencies also contract with surveillance tech companies like Clearview AI and [Voyager](#), which scrape your information from the internet and social media and feed it into their own algorithms.

Consumer tech companies you may interact with on a daily basis also provide services to police. [Amazon's smart doorbell Ring, for instance](#), gives some police special access to their Neighbors social network and makes it easy for the police to monitor and request Ring footage from consumers.

Contracts between tech companies and law enforcement agencies have become more frequent as the tech industry seeks out new avenues of growth, experts say. Because many of the spaces tech is already in have clear dominant players, law enforcement contracts have become an appealing growth strategy because of the seemingly endless supply of funding for agencies like the Department of Homeland Security and local police.

Data-sharing

There's also quite a bit of inter-agency data sharing happening at the local, state and federal levels of government. While it might seem unsurprising that law enforcement agencies share information, you might be surprised to learn that an entity like the DMV [shares information with agencies like Ice](#).

That data-sharing is made easier by services from companies like [Palantir](#), which creates a centralized network of digital records which include "chronic offenders" and other people deemed of interest that can be easily accessed by the company's law enforcement partners at all levels – from many local police departments to the FBI.

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HEADLINE	04/05 Cost of zero-Covid in Shanghai
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/05/this-is-inhumane-the-cost-of-zero-covid-in-shanghai
GIST	<p>Jia Ruiling's* father has been enduring severe pain since 17 March. He has late-stage stomach cancer, but his hospital refused to treat him because Jia's neighbourhood in Shanghai was under lockdown as a result of a handful of Covid cases.</p> <p>"We begged the hospital to accept him again and again," Jia said. "At some point my father was in so much pain that he wanted to take his life. What can we do? Please, help us let the central government know."</p> <p>China's strict zero-Covid policy means all positive cases have to be hospitalised. But in the last few weeks, as case numbers have risen sharply and 26 million people entered a harsh lockdown, mainland China's most important financial hub has come to a standstill. The number of new daily positive cases exceeded 10,000 for the first time on Monday. Although 38,000 health workers have been shipped in from around China to help, medical resources are overwhelmingly diverted to combat Covid, leaving it difficult for non-Covid patients like Jia's father to access them.</p> <p>Luo Ruixiang*, a 39-year-old Chinese worker in the Republic of the Congo, had a similar experience. He flew home in March in the hope of receiving urgent treatment after damaging his left eye.</p> <p>He landed in Shanghai and informed his quarantine hotel and customs officials of his medical needs, but for more than a week he heard nothing. "I was worried that if I waited until the quarantine was over, I would have already gone blind," he said.</p> <p>Desperate, Luo went on to the social media site Weibo to plead for help. Local media soon called him, and medical help was quickly on the way. "Thankfully, the operation is done," he said. "It's not supposed to be this complicated, but as a small potato everything is so difficult for me."</p> <p>The Omicron outbreak in Shanghai is the largest test for China's zero-Covid policy so far, and the city is struggling. On Monday, health officials reported 8,581 asymptomatic and 425 symptomatic cases for the previous 24 hours. The numbers are small compared with countries such as the UK and US, but they are some of the largest in China since the virus was first reported in Wuhan in late 2019.</p>

Critics say the city, one of China's most sophisticated, should have been better prepared. "They have been too successful since 2020, so they became complacent," Jia said, stressing she was not anti-government but that her father's suffering had made her "very angry".

"Both the virus and people are changing," said Chen Xi, a public health expert at Yale School of Public Health. "It is the first time that the subvariant of Omicron, ie BA.2, strikes Shanghai. The unprecedented speed of spreading fast exceeds contact tracing and other conventional public health measures. People also have salient Covid fatigue after two-plus years of stringent health measures."

Helpless and frustrated

As lockdown continues in China's biggest metropolis, the sense of helplessness is overwhelming. Photos and videos that showed young children separated from their parents at a Shanghai hospital stirred anger on social media over the weekend. One parent whose toddler was taken away after testing positive wrote on social media: "I'm so upset ... This is inhumane."

Several Shanghai-based EU diplomats sent a letter to the city's government on 31 March, pressing it to provide assistance to their citizens when they needed medical help. They also urged Shanghai not to separate children from their parents "whatever the circumstances".

Shanghai's health officials defended the policy on Monday as parents and guardians voiced their anger on social media. Wu Qianyu, an official from the Shanghai municipal health commission, said the policy was integral to efforts to prevent and control the virus.

Responding to complaints, Ma Chunlei, the secretary general of Shanghai's municipal government, admitted on Friday that his administration had handled the outbreak poorly. "Our awareness of the highly infectious and insidious Omicron mutant strain was not sufficient, and our preparation for the significant rise in infections was not comprehensive," he said. "We sincerely accept your criticism and are working hard to improve it."

Despite the confession, some say things still have not improved. Deng Zhaoyang's* wife and three-year-old son have been in a government-run quarantine facility since 29 March. "The facility is run by volunteers and no one seems to be in charge. So much so, we don't even know when they are going to leave the facility, and no one went to do Covid tests for them either," he said.

Deng, who emigrated to the city as an adult years ago, said that in the last couple of years when things were normal and other parts of China grappled with outbreaks, he had never thought the same thing would happen in Shanghai.

"Before Omicron arrived, it was understandable that those who got it should be sent to quarantine facilities," he said. "But now most of them only have mild symptoms. Shouldn't the government adjust their policy accordingly?"

The sense of frustration is shared by some of the city's medical professionals. In a revealing phone conversation last week that has been making the rounds online at home and abroad, a official at the Shanghai Chinese centre for disease control and prevention (CDC) said the city's medical resources were under severe strain.

"I've already suggested [to higher officials] multiple times that those with mild or no symptoms should just be quarantined at home," she said, adding that current efforts to control the virus were more about politics. "But who has listened to me?" Some Chinese internet users, however, called her "wrong" and "dangerous". On Saturday, Shanghai Pudong CDC said it was investigating the caller's complaint. It also issued an internal notice, telling staff who answer the hotline to speak with one voice.

On the same day, Sun Chunlan, a Chinese vice-premier, stressed "unswerving adherence to the dynamic zero-Covid approach" on an official visit to Shanghai, according to Xinhua. Less than 24 hours later, the

Chinese military dispatched more than 2,000 medics to Shanghai to support efforts to curb the spread of the virus.

‘Not sustainable’

Jin Dong-yan, a professor at Hong Kong University’s school of biomedical sciences, said it would be weeks before the virus could be under control. “Even if they can achieve zero Covid with exceedingly high cost, another accident might cause another major surge ... Living with the virus is the only viable option,” he said.

A large part of “living with the virus” is to do with an effective vaccine. Officials have begun talking openly in recent months about mRNA vaccines, an indication that the authorities may have been thinking about adopting vaccines other than the Chinese-made Sinopharm and Sinovac. Dr Zhong Nanshan, the country’s top respiratory expert, said in December that China should learn about the good things in other countries, such as mRNA vaccines. The Shanghai government also said in an official document last week that it supported importing vaccines and Covid treatment drugs.

“Deploying rapid antigen tests [RAT] and approval of mRNA vaccines are both doable as they have ample data for [the authorities] to approve mRNA vaccine as well as adequate capacity to mass manufacture RAT,” Chen said, adding that both low vaccination rates among older adults and the vaccine technology being used in China were “worrisome”.

“The remaining time window is fast shrinking,” he said. “It is so important for other regions in China to learn and ramp up vaccination before the local surge begins.”

For Jia, the idea of living with the virus seems remote. She just hopes her father will be sent to his cancer hospital as soon as possible. “His pain has alleviated as a result of bigger doses of painkillers in the last couple of days, but this is not a sustainable solution. He needs to see the doctor,” she said.

Since Jia revealed her father’s ordeal online last week, she said she had been receiving attention from the media. Perhaps because of the pressure, her local district authorities had called her to say they could send her father to the hospital.

“They had one requirement though,” she said. “They wanted me to take down my social media posts first. I refused. They did not manage to send my father to the cancer hospital in the end, because they are only a district-level authority, and they were unable to persuade a municipal-level institution after all.”

** Names have been changed to protect identities*

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HEADLINE	04/04 UK NHS expands Covid symptoms list
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/04/uk-covid-symptoms-list-expanded-with-nine-more-signs-of-illness
GIST	<p>The official list of Covid-19 symptoms on the NHS has been extended to cover nine new symptoms, including sore throat, fatigue and headache.</p> <p>They join the three symptoms of a fever, a new and persistent cough, and a loss or change in taste or smell, according to nhs.uk.</p> <p>Extending the list may help reduce infections by helping people detect whether they may have Covid; however, it coincides with the end of the offer of free universal Covid-19 tests to help people confirm whether they have the virus.</p> <p>Covid infection levels have hit a record high in the UK, with almost 5 million people estimated to be infected.</p>

The new signs are:

- Shortness of breath.
- Feeling tired or exhausted.
- An aching body.
- A headache.
- A sore throat.
- A blocked or runny nose.
- Loss of appetite.
- Diarrhoea.
- Feeling sick or being sick.

A note on the website states: “The symptoms are very similar to symptoms of other illnesses, such as colds and flu.”

The UK has had just three symptoms on the list since the emergence of the virus two years ago, despite other organisations such as the World [Health](#) Organization (WHO) and the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention in the US having longer symptom lists for some time.

It is understood the government’s chief medical officer would have needed to sign off on the expanded list of symptoms.

In England, some people still qualify for free tests in certain circumstances, but most people are now expected to pay or go without. Under the previous testing regime people only qualified for PCR tests if they had one of the three symptoms or if they had been invited to take a test.

Prof Tim Spector, the lead scientist of the Zoe Covid-19 symptom tracker app, praised the decision in [a tweet](#) in which he said the NHS had “finally changed” the symptom list after two years of lobbying. “Pity they have the order wrong, but it’s a start and could help reduce infections,” he said.

In March he suggested that the shorter symptom list, along with the decision to drop isolation advice and withdraw free testing, could have driven up transmission rates.

Spector said last month: “Many people are no longer isolating when they have symptoms, either because they feel they don’t have to any more or because they or their employers still don’t recognise symptoms like runny nose or sore throat as Covid.”

On Friday the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said that 4.9 million people in the UK were estimated to have had Covid-19 in the week ending 26 March, up from 4.3 million in the previous week. The ONS said an estimated one in every 13 people in England had the virus during that week.

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HEADLINE	04/04 New front in US information war with Russia
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/release-of-secrets-represents-new-front-in-u-s-information-war-with-russia-11649070001
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON—As Russian troops amassed at Ukraine’s border in early December, White House officials pored over multiple versions of a highly classified map that detailed Moscow’s burgeoning military presence.</p> <p>The administration provided a version of the map and accompanying text to the Washington Post, which published it online Dec. 3, just days before a tense phone call between President Biden and Russian leader Vladimir Putin. The release of the map—a blend of secrets gathered by U.S. spy agencies and commercially available satellite images—kicked off a virtually unprecedented effort by the Biden administration to use U.S. intelligence to shape the battlefield of Europe’s bloodiest conflict in decades.</p>

The [new approach to public intelligence sharing](#) has involved declassifying a cascade of secrets normally reserved for top policy makers: updates on Russian troop movements; detailed allegations that Moscow would stage a pretext for its invasion; even, last week, reports of growing [tension between Mr. Putin and his generals](#). White House officials call the strategy “downgrade and share”—with “downgrade” referring to lowering the classification level of U.S. documents or data.

U.S. officials say that although the tactic didn’t prevent the [Russian invasion of Ukraine](#), they have evidence the public deployment of intelligence has been effective in other ways. It did, they say, stymie Mr. Putin’s plans to use a “false flag” operation, essentially a staged attack Moscow would blame on Ukraine, as a pretext for war, and might have delayed the invasion itself, giving Kyiv more time to prepare.

Citing those successes, some see “downgrade and share” as foreshadowing future uses of intelligence in international crises.

“I really think this is a harbinger,” said Glenn Gerstell, former general counsel at the National Security Agency. “Future conflicts are going to be shaped, instigated and deterred by releases of information beforehand.”

The plan to declassify and share intelligence dates to the fall of last year, when Mr. Biden signed off on it. His national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, was a prime architect and oversaw execution of the initiative, U.S. officials said, with support from Secretary of State Antony Blinken, CIA Director William Burns and Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines.

The initiative Mr. Biden approved in November, a senior official said, was an outgrowth of expanded U.S. intelligence-sharing with European allies. That trans-Atlantic effort was aimed at ensuring Washington and its partners had a common picture of Russia’s gathering military might around Ukraine, and at bolstering resolve to act, U.S. officials said.

In terms of convincing allies of the threat, however, the information sharing yielded mixed results. European allies, except Britain, greeted American predictions of an invasion with skepticism, U.S. officials said. The chief of Germany’s BND foreign intelligence service [was caught in Kyiv when the invasion began](#) and had to be evacuated overland.

And France, a senior European official said, thought Russia was using threats but wouldn’t invade. France’s military intelligence chief resigned last week.

The Biden administration has also had to tread a fine line between [warning of Russia’s plans](#) and being painted as too alarmist.

For example, one version of the map made public in early December had bright red arrows pointing from Russian military encampments into Ukraine, showing where troops would breach the border. Some officials looking at that depiction realized it might erroneously suggest a Russian invasion was imminent. It was decided, “No, we’re not going to use that one,” a senior U.S. official involved in the process said.

It was set aside in favor of a map that denoted the location of Russian units with circles, the official said.

The support from senior intelligence leaders for sharing so much information publicly represents a major shift, a second senior U.S. official said. The official recalled how in 2014, Washington was unable to effectively counteract Moscow’s information operations surrounding its annexation of Crimea and incursions into eastern Ukraine. “Getting the intelligence community to declassify anything, even for public messaging, was like pulling teeth,” the official said.

While lawmakers on the House and Senate intelligence committees are regularly briefed privately on Russia intelligence, the White House hasn't given Congress a heads-up before the public releases, according to Sen. Mark Warner, Democratic chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

Mr. Warner says he is an enthusiastic supporter of the policy. "It puts some of the intel leadership outside their comfort zone, but I think it's been very, very effective in terms of rallying support and keeping Putin off guard," he said.

The flurry of declassification moves has been a relief for some lawmakers, who have watched as the U.S. has been stung by Moscow's elaborate, multipronged disinformation operations, including during the 2016 presidential election. "My gosh, maybe the West is finally winning the information war," Mr. Warner said.

That didn't necessarily seem the case in early February, when the administration said Russia was planning [to stage a fake attack on its own forces](#) that it would blame on Ukraine, complete with a "very graphic propaganda video" depicting corpses and mourners played by actors. The allegation drew skepticism, demands for more evidence, and comparisons to the George W. Bush administration's manipulation of intelligence to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

"We had a lot of, 'Why should we trust you after Iraq, after...'—name your perceived intelligence failure," said the second senior U.S. official.

"The best antidote to that suspicion is that we have been proven right," the official said.

U.S. officials declined to discuss some aspects of "downgrade and share," including the sources of the intelligence and details of the interaction between the White House and U.S. spy agencies.

Current and former intelligence officials suggested the declassified information is drawn mostly from communication intercepts, satellite images and other technical means. Current officials declined to say whether the CIA's human source network is involved.

"My sense is, it isn't, otherwise they wouldn't have done it" because of the risks to precious human spies, said Mark Lowenthal, a former CIA and State Department intelligence official.

So far as is known, no sources of U.S. intelligence have been compromised as a result of the disclosure of sanitized spy reports, said one U.S. official with access to such information.

The material prepared for release goes through standard declassification channels, a U.S. intelligence official said, rather than some special task force created to handle it. The latter might have raised concerns that the White House was manipulating or politicizing the intelligence flow.

Ms. Haines's office has coordinated with declassification experts across U.S. intelligence agencies to make declassification decisions, said Nicole de Haay, a spokeswoman for the Director of National Intelligence. "The intelligence community surged personnel and resources to support classification reviews," Ms. de Haay said.

When information comes in and spy agencies object to releasing it, an intramural negotiation sometimes ensues, current and former officials said. White House officials will ask intelligence agency representatives if there's another way to present the information without jeopardizing sources and methods, the first senior official said.

"Sometimes the answer is yes, and sometimes the answer is no," the official said. "You want to have a conversation about what the concern is."

The process is made easier, the officials said, by the proliferation of commercial satellite imagery, videos, flight tracking and other data on social-media websites that has charted the Russian buildup and

	<p>invasion. U.S. government releases often confirm and expand on open-source intelligence, giving it the patina of authority.</p> <p>Mr. Lowenthal, who is also an intelligence historian, said that other than the Iraq example, U.S. presidents have usually released intelligence in the aftermath of an event, not before. President Ronald Reagan in 1983 sent his U.N. ambassador to the Security Council with tape of an intercepted conversation showing that Soviet pilots shot down a civilian Korean airliner without firing warning shots.</p> <p>While there has been grumbling among some former CIA officers about the Biden administration approach, “I have no problem personally with them doing it,” Mr. Lowenthal said. “Otherwise, why have the intelligence?”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 IRS struggles to rebuild workforce
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/04/04/irs-tax-backlog-hiring/
GIST	<p>OGDEN, Utah — Four months had passed since the Internal Revenue Service warned that during the coronavirus pandemic it had built up a staggering pile of unprocessed tax returns, and finally the day had arrived to try to do something about it.</p> <p>The Ogden IRS campus was hosting the agency’s first major job fair in Utah in decades, after a rush of departures that had helped cause the backlog. The marketing department had blitzed the area with help-wanted ads and sent postcards to homes with incomes under \$50,000. The head of human resources was on the way from Washington. Shrink-wrapped pallets of bottled water were ready, and recruiting teams had set up chairs inside a building in Clearfield, near the IRS campus. A stack of forms on a table listed résumé-writing tips, federal government benefits and the open positions: clerk and tax examiner, with starting pay at \$15.61 an hour.</p> <p>About 400 people had registered for the event in the three weeks since the Biden administration announced plans to hire 5,000 people this year in Ogden and at the IRS’s two other paper-processing centers, in Austin and Kansas City, Mo., through a system that bypasses normal federal hiring rules and allows instant job offers. But the organizers knew that no-show rates could run as high as 40 percent. All morning it had been raining hard.</p> <p>The IRS’s unprecedented backlog last winter of 24 million returns and pieces of taxpayer correspondence for the 2020 tax year was propelled by colliding crises: The pandemic decimated its workforce after years of budget cuts and attrition; new stimulus measures added to the workload; and the agency remained crippled by its way of doing business, processing the millions of returns it still receives on paper each filing season with red-pen edits, manual data entry and clunky computer software that dates to the 1960s.</p> <p>With technology upgrades on hold, the men and women who gathered here off Interstate 15 represented one agency’s effort to reboot after a public health crisis that left major functions of the federal government in disarray, with uncertainty about when they would return to a pre-pandemic normal.</p> <p>Scott Wallace, acting field director for submission processing, hoped that any recruits would fill some of the 700 openings on his staff of 3,400.</p> <p>“It’s a lot of empty seats, isn’t it?” Wallace said as he led a tour of the campus, where rolling carts stuffed with unprocessed returns lined the hallways. “Literally, I don’t have enough people to fill them. These are blue-collar \$16- and \$17-an-hour jobs.” His workforce is aging, as is the IRS broadly, with an average age of 55, and more than half the employees are eligible to retire. Commissioner Charles Rettig told Congress in March that the agency will need to hire 52,000 employees in the next six years just to tread water.</p> <p>The rebuilding effort across the nation and in Ogden has collided with a new obstacle: the country’s heated competition for workers. Utah’s unemployment rate of 2.1 percent in February tied with Nebraska’s for</p>

the lowest in the country. The jobless rate around Ogden was 2.3 percent, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The total of 6,000 employees on the Ogden campus makes it the city's largest employer, but the government is competing with a nearby Air Force base, an automotive supplier paying entry-level air-bag assembly workers \$17.82 an hour, a kidney dialysis company — and a just completed Amazon distribution center down the street that's hiring for 500 jobs, some starting at \$17 an hour.

In Ogden, at the sprawling, low-slung brick campus built in the 1950s to process returns from eight Western states, Wallace needs to fill weekend shifts and swing shifts that go until at least 1 a.m. and often as late as 3 a.m. Ogden used to furlough employees hired for tax season for as long as six months each year, but it's now a 12-month, 22-hour-a-day operation, the lights and computers turning off just two hours a day for the indefinite future.

To buck up everyone's spirits, Amanda Walters, a 29-year-old tax examiner hired 18 months ago at the height of the pandemic, joined with a colleague to create a giant collage of a mountain with climbers at various levels. "Together we rise ... to the top!" they wrote, adding targets inside white clouds around the mountaintop, which they'll reach when they've processed 1.3 million returns by, they hope, July.

"I don't know how many times I've heard, 'This is not the norm,' " Walters said. "This is my norm."

Two workers at the Ogden campus created a collage showing their team's inventory targets as they plow through the backlog of paper tax returns. (Alex Goodlett/For The Washington Post)

She works as backup line supervisor in the code and edit division, where paper returns are marked by hand before information is entered into a computer by the next team, keystroke by keystroke. The paper takes a mind-numbing path from room to room to be sorted, retyped and filed, sometimes with a stop at a team devoted to discovering errors. They're not all that rare: The error rate for paper returns was 22 percent last year, according to the Taxpayer Advocate Service. Along the way, a paper return is touched by humans at least a dozen times.

All of these paper returns — which make up 10 percent of the IRS's work, with the rest electronic filings — are marked with ink and old-fashioned rubber stamps to give them locator numbers before they go into storage. Just one company is still in business to service the stamps, which must be advanced to the next day with a wooden stylus.

"We're probably the only place that even uses something like this anymore," Wallace mused as the thrum of 30 employees stamping at once echoed in the hallway. "Is it time to look at modernization?" he added, his lips curling into a smile.

The IRS has hunted for money from Congress for decades to update its antiquated systems. For now, the priority is getting the government caught up on the 2020 tax year.

"We feel the pressure, but we are taxpayers as well," said Michelle Thatcher, 41, a lead, in IRS parlance, in the error resolution department.

"If the rest of the country could understand we're doing the best to help them," Thatcher said. Then she issued a plea: "Please, honestly, if they could e-file, they wouldn't have to wait for us to touch their return 15 times. If they would just do that, they wouldn't be so angry at us."

The IRS shut down relatively briefly during the pandemic, sending its employees home from early April to June 2020. In-person work ramped up gradually over several months. Everyone saw colleagues disappear, and the causes varied: retirement; resignation over fears of getting sick in a crowded workplace; anger at the government's vaccine mandate; loss of child care; the stress of wearing a mask for eight hours, plus mandatory overtime, which could add up to dozens of extra hours a week.

"With all the unknowns, it made a lot of people nervous," said Brett Bemenderfer, a program manager in submission processing. "The pay for some of our positions comes in below the poverty line," he noted, "and then we bring them in and hand them a red pen and some don't find that too appealing."

The pandemic had a big upside, though. The departures opened opportunities, with many employees finding themselves quickly promoted. McKenzie Holland, hired as a clerk right before the pandemic, soon was moved up to lead a team of 34 employees. “I know people who’ve gotten a management position from a clerk just during the pandemic,” she said.

What the IRS can’t offer, though, is telework. Amy Hussey, a manager, recalled how she tried to talk a waitress at a local restaurant into applying to the agency. But the woman wanted to work from home — an option for some IRS jobs, but not the ones that directly handle returns.

“We’re a paper-driven organization,” Hussey said. “We have companies all over Utah that opened their doors to working from home, and I think it’s impacted us.”

By 3 p.m. on the Thursday of the job fair, the sky had cleared and an overloaded computer system that had caused brief pandemonium in the morning had new power. The crowd was substantial, a mix of high school students in T-shirts, people in their 30s and 40s in jeans and in suits, and even retirees, waiting patiently with folders on their laps, their résumés inside, and pink tickets to present when their numbers were called.

Wendy Jenkins, a recruitment analyst with 35 years of service at the Ogden campus, was moving down the line of seated applicants with her pitch.

“Once you get your foot in the door, the sky’s the limit, honestly!” she shouted, her voice hoarse. “A lot of your private-sector jobs don’t have pensions anymore, but we have an awesome retirement system!” There was more, Jenkins said: flexible schedules, two-thirds of health insurance paid by the government, a child-care subsidy in the works, paid parental leave when a baby comes. Anyone with unpaid taxes would need to pay them. “But that’s okay! We want you to join our IRS family. We’re working for the nation.”

The staff was starting to feel optimistic that, just maybe, workers would trade up from their retail jobs.

“I’m on my feet all day, and I’m looking for something with benefits,” Angela Fronk, 51, said as she waited. She was making \$12 an hour as an assistant manager at a 7-Eleven 25 miles north in Brigham City, with no paid vacation. She had worked through the pandemic and never gotten the virus. “I heard the IRS was hiring on the spot, and I want to see if that’s true,” she said.

A few chairs down, Mike Gerdes 60, had tried to get hired by the IRS several times but had gotten nowhere on the federal government’s cumbersome job portal, which can take six months or more to work through — if it responds at all. Gerdes was now unloading trucks for a local grocery store, but the work was unsteady, he said. “I can unload crockpots all night into a trailer, but this sounds a lot better.”

Like Gerdes, many waiting in line sensed new possibilities.

After 14 years as a produce associate at Walmart, Cory Farley, 37, was making \$14.95 an hour and felt underappreciated at a job he had no passion for, he said. It was time for a change.

His wife, hired by the IRS last year as a tax examiner, had convinced him to apply. “She said, ‘This is completely different. You’re going to like it,’ ” he said.

The job fair was full of people like Farley, with family and friends who’d referred them — and would get a \$500 bonus if the recruits stayed on a year. Ogden, with its large Mormon population, is a community that tends to stay put, and IRS employees can span generations of families.

The candidates presented their résumés and took part in interviews that were not really interviews at all, the assumption being that as long as an applicant had six months of full-time work, a year of education out of high school or a combination, a job offer would be made.

The offers, pending background checks, started rolling in. A deaf woman, assisted by a sign-language interpreter, burst into tears when hers came. Another woman in a suit cried, too.

“Keep watching your email!” Christopher White told an overnight stocker at Sam’s Club as he typed the man’s information into his laptop computer. “In about five minutes, I’m going to send you a temporary job offer.” White and Becky Stevens formed a tag team, with Stevens asking if anyone had questions she could answer. If not, she volunteered what she thought they needed to know, including that their health insurance would start on their first day of work.

“These are seasonal positions,” she said, and explained that if applicants were furloughed, they would be eligible for unemployment insurance. “But we haven’t furloughed in two or three years, so I wouldn’t worry.”

A man asked if he could work from home. “We just have to keep control of those documents,” Stevens said, explaining why he couldn’t.

The recruits would start May 9 if they passed background checks and accepted final job offers, but after orientation and training, it would be another five to six weeks before they would be helping to cut the backlog.

Farley would be the last person of the day to get an offer.

He chose the swing shift so that his wife could use the couple’s car for her day shift. He would get a 10 percent night differential after 6 p.m. “Congratulations!” said the recruiter, Amber Bemenderfer, whom Farley recognized from years ago in high school and the wife of program manager Brett. “We’re so excited to have you!”

“I’m feeling pretty excited!” he said, though he still had to return to be fingerprinted. “Like this is the right step for me.”

By the time the job fair closed on Friday, 653 people had tentative offers in Ogden. It was a start. But unknowns loomed, the biggest being whether the IRS could keep the new employees on board and avoid another staffing crisis.

“They’re coming through the door and that’s fantastic,” said Brett Bemenderfer. “We just have to keep them in the door.”

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HEADLINE	04/04 Record-setting cold snap hits Europe
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2022/04/04/europe-record-cold-france-agriculture/
GIST	<p>A historically intense April cold snap has descended on Europe, with temperatures plummeting to 20 to 30 degrees (11 to 18 degrees Celsius) below normal. The record-breaking cold has triggered harsh frosts, shocking early-blooming plants and crops in several countries.</p> <p>The unseasonably cold weather, which arrived over the weekend, follows warmer-than-normal temperatures in previous weeks that caused a rapid greening of flora — particularly in France’s agricultural regions.</p> <p>“It’s still difficult to evaluate the [damage] caused by the frost, but orchards (‘stone fruits’ such as plum trees, apricot, cherry) and vineyards have been impacted,” Jean-Marc Touzard, director of research at the French National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment (INRAE), said in an email.</p> <p>Climate scientists are concerned that warming late-winter and early-spring temperatures are increasing the frequency of “false springs,” which spur earlier vegetation green-up before the threat has passed of frigid temperatures that can wipe out young, vulnerable plants.</p>

Météo-France, the country's weather forecasting agency, [tweeted](#) that France had its coldest April morning on record Monday (dating to 1947), with national minimum temperatures of 29.3 degrees (minus-1.5 Celsius). In the mountains, it was [as cold as minus-6.7 degrees \(minus-21.5 Celsius\)](#), an April record.

Guillaume Séchet, a French meteorologist, [tweeted](#) that April 1 to 3 were the coldest first three days of April in the country since at least 1930.

Maximiliano Herrera, a climatologist who tracks international weather extremes, tweeted that freezing temperatures and record cold also were observed in [Germany, Spain](#) and [Austria](#).

Weather maps showed a sprawling region of unseasonably cold conditions from Portugal to western Russia. The biggest temperature differences from normal were centered between Spain and Germany, with France hit hardest.

Warm winter conditions probably made crops more vulnerable to frost. In Germany, winter was warmer than normal and recorded nearly 20 more frost-free days than in an average year. According to the European Commission's monthly crop monitoring [bulletin](#), "Frost tolerance is rather weak, making crops susceptible to freezing temperatures" in Germany.

In France, winter was around 1.8 degrees Fahrenheit (1 degree Celsius) above normal from February to mid-March.

Serge Zaka, an expert in climate and agriculture in France, said [in a Twitter thread](#) that the recent freezing weather is very damaging.

A second straight false spring in Europe

It's the second straight year that a harsh cold spell has arrived after an unusually early spring bloom. Last year, parts of Europe experienced their warmest March on record before record cold arrived in early April. Switzerland and Slovenia [registered record April low temperatures](#). Many locations in France and Italy endured their coldest April weather on record.

The April cold snap in 2021 was devastating for French winegrowers, leading to \$2.4 billion in damage, [according to the Associated Press](#). Some vineyards lost 80 percent of their grapes.

However, the effects of the current cold wave in France may be less severe than in 2021 because of the timing and coverage, Touzard said. This year, the cold spell occurred a few days earlier, and vegetation growth, especially for vines, was less advanced. Many buds are still not open. The cold wave also seems to be less extensive, concentrated mainly in southwestern regions.

He also said winegrowers learned from last year's devastating freeze. Now they have better monitoring of the frostiest plots, and they pruned their vineyards later and put up more protection. Some French vintners are [lighting large candles](#) or using sprinklers to thaw grapevines.

"The fruit tree growers and grape vine growers are ... afraid of this kind of damage. It's starting to be quite regular," said Guillaume Charrier, also a researcher at INRAE. "It was about four times, maybe in the last five years or so" near the Rhone River in eastern France and near Bourdeaux.

"It's part of the normal agricultural life to have frost events, but also we have the abnormal warmer winter temperature that increases the vulnerability of plants," Charrier said.

False springs have caused agricultural damage not only in Europe in recent years, but also in several parts of the United States.

"If those flower buds get hit by frost, they don't regenerate that spring, and they don't regenerate for the whole year," Theresa Crimmins, director of the USA National Phenology Network and a research

professor at the University of Arizona, [told The Washington Post in December](#). “There’s been in recent years some really devastating impacts where we’ve had early warmth, followed by frosts and then total loss of crops.”

A false spring in March 2012 was followed by an April freeze that resulted in a half-billion dollars in damage in Michigan. [A false spring in 2017](#) and ensuing early-April frost [resulted in \\$2 billion in economic damage](#) in the Southeast.

A [2019 study](#) of how spring frost damage to trees may change in Europe as the climate warms found that some sensitive species “will paradoxically experience more frost damage in the future warming climate.”

Cold in Europe, but unusually warm surrounding it

The record-breaking cold in Europe in no way refutes the planet’s long-term warming trend. While it has been frigid in Europe, abnormally mild air has covered much of Asia and large parts of the North Atlantic. Herrera [tweeted](#) that an “extraordinary heat wave is kicking off in Central Asia.” In Turkmenistan, it was 101.7 degrees (38.7 Celsius) on Monday.

The [University of Maine’s Climate Reanalyzer website](#) indicated that the average Northern Hemisphere temperature was 1.6 degrees (0.9 Celsius) above the 1979-2000 mean Monday.

Some research also shows that climate change may intensify cold waves at certain times and places because of more erratic jet stream behavior, even if winters are globally warmer, although the notion is debated in the scientific community.

Unseasonably cold weather and the threat of frost will continue through midweek in southern France before temperatures moderate.

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HEADLINE	04/04 Tribal leaders: WA ignoring treaty rights
SOURCE	https://crosscut.com/equity/2022/04/tribal-leaders-say-wa-state-ignoring-treaty-rights
GIST	<p>In 2015, the state of Washington began investigating two enrolled members of the Tulalip Tribes for alleged illegal shellfish trafficking. More than six years later, the charges have been dismissed, but the men’s fish-buying business is shuttered, and they say broader concerns of state interference in tribal sovereignty remain unaddressed.</p> <p>The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife investigation into Hazen Shopbell and Anthony Paul, who owned one of Puget Sound’s largest fish-buying operations, came amid complaints from non-Indigenous fish buyers about loss of business resulting from an alleged monopoly involving tribal fishers. While the resulting criminal charges didn’t produce any convictions, Shopbell and Paul say the ordeal led to the collapse of their business and ended a period of fairer prices for the crab and fish caught by Indigenous people.</p> <p>The case officially concluded last month after Skagit County and state prosecutors declined to appeal a judge’s ruling dismissing the charges on treaty rights grounds. Now, tribal governments and treaty rights organizations in Washington are drawing attention to the case as an example of how, they say, the state isn’t fully respecting tribal sovereignty.</p> <p>Shopbell said he is relieved that the prosecution is over, but, like others, he worries that he won’t be the last example of Washington officials and agencies interfering with tribal citizens who want to exercise treaty rights. And despite the saga’s consequences for him, he believes his case has at least raised awareness about the issue.</p> <p>“I’m grateful it’s over,” Shopbell said, before adding: “The way I see it, I think it’s just the beginning.”</p> <p>Washington tribes and treaty rights advocates say the concerns over treaty fishing and shellfishing rights are longstanding, arguing that the Fish and Wildlife Department and other state officials have resisted</p>

court rulings, like the landmark 1970s [Boldt Decision](#) in the case of U.S. v. Washington. That ruling upheld treaty fishing rights and guaranteed co-management of state fisheries with tribes.

The Fish and Wildlife Department said its investigation of Shopbell and Paul was proper and didn't violate tribal sovereignty, and that larger concerns about hostility toward treaty rights are unfounded. Still, treaty rights organizations, tribes and others are pressing state leaders to address their concerns.

Not addressing those issues, said Gabe Galanda, a Seattle tribal rights attorney who represented Shopbell in the criminal case and Paul in a related civil case, could mean Indigenous people interested in starting a similar business may be discouraged from doing so out of fears of legal action.

"They're afraid they will be the next to be persecuted and prosecuted," he said. "The status quo has been restored, as it was before."

'I'll give my life for this'

Many Washington tribes signed treaties with the federal government in the 1850s that guaranteed their rights to fish and hunt in their traditional homelands. The state of Washington's refusal to recognize those rights led to the ["Fish Wars" of the 1960s and 1970s](#).

Then, in 1974, a federal judge affirmed those treaty rights in the Boldt Decision. That ruling recognized the tribes as co-managers of the state's fisheries and guaranteed tribes half of the harvestable catch in Washington. Subsequent court rulings reinforced those rights or expanded them to shellfish, for example.

When the Fish and Wildlife Department launched its investigation in 2015, Shopbell and Paul owned and operated a multimillion-dollar wholesale seafood distribution company, Puget Sound Seafood Distributors. The business had become one of the state's largest wholesale seafood distributors by offering higher prices to Indigenous fishers for their catches, helping to corner the Coast Salish market.

Shopbell said he first got the idea to start a business like the one he operated with Paul after hearing complaints from family members and other tribal members about getting low prices for their catches. That, according to Galanda, didn't sit well with non-Indigenous businesses, who complained to the Fish and Wildlife Department about an allegedly illegal monopoly.

Those complaints kicked off a department investigation in 2015 that would eventually lead to felony charges in Skagit County for Shopbell and Paul for illegal trafficking of bait. The department had already presented the same charges to [several other counties](#), which declined to prosecute. A judge would later say he was troubled by the department ["shopping the prosecution"](#) to those counties.

In 2019, the Skagit County Superior Court dismissed the trafficking charges after a judge said the Fish and Wildlife Department had seized evidence — bait clams — without a warrant and then failed to properly preserve it, while acknowledging — but without issuing a ruling — that the two men had a treaty rights defense.

After an appeal from Skagit County prosecutors, a state appeals court returned the case to the lower court, saying the judge had to determine whether Fish and Wildlife agents acted in bad faith during the investigation.

Late last year, the Skagit County court dismissed the charges, saying the state didn't have jurisdiction in the matter in the first place. The case formally came to an end last month, when Skagit County prosecutors declined to appeal the ruling.

A concurrent prosecution of Paul and three other men for shellfish trafficking in Pierce County was also dismissed in 2018 after the prosecutor revealed that the Fish and Wildlife Department had withheld vital information from the prosecutor's office that "would be a complete defense in this case," according to the prosecutor's dismissal memo.

Fish and Wildlife's arrests also led to a federal civil rights lawsuit from Shopbell and Paul. Some of the claims were dismissed because the department had immunity from the lawsuit, but last year the agency settled claims of wrongful arrest of the two men for \$50,000.

Galanda, a member of the Round Valley Indian Tribes of California, said he's represented Indigenous clients in the past who faced Fish and Wildlife investigations and potential prosecution. In those cases, he said, clients made deals with the state to settle their cases in order to get their property back and move on with their lives, often because they didn't have the resources for a drawn-out legal fight.

That kept the issue from gaining widespread attention, he said. But Shopbell and Paul were different because they decided to fight the charges, which helped highlight how the Fish and Wildlife Department interferes in tribal treaty rights, Galanda said.

Shopbell said "there was no settling with me" and that he intends to fight the case to the end, no matter what the consequences could be.

"These guys have been coming after us for years, decades," he said. "I'll give my life for this. That's how much it meant to me."

Pressing for answers

To Shopbell, his case illustrates how Washington officials haven't moved on from fighting against treaty rights in the Fish Wars of the 1960s and '70s.

Others express similar concerns.

In late January, the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, an organization with 57 member tribes that advocates for tribal interests in the region, passed a [resolution](#) during its winter conference calling on Washington Gov. Jay Inslee or state Attorney General Bob Ferguson to investigate the Fish and Wildlife Department for potential violations of law or policy stemming from its investigation of Shopbell and Paul.

The organization also called for the department to disclose the cost associated with the investigation and prosecution, as well as a moratorium on the department impounding tribal citizen boats or vehicles taken on treaty lands or waters.

In a response to questions from a reporter, a Ferguson spokesperson provided a Feb. 17 letter to the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians responding to its resolution. The letter didn't say whether it would investigate itself or the Fish and Wildlife Department, as the organization had requested, but indicated that Ferguson didn't believe his office had violated any laws or policies.

"I look forward to working with you on these and other issues," Ferguson said in his letter. "I strive to be a strong partner with Indian Country, and fully support the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians' efforts to support tribal self-determination."

The affiliated tribes' resolution followed an October letter from the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission to the Fish and Wildlife Department that raised concerns about "discriminatory or illegal enforcement actions against tribal members in treaty territories and waters," where tribal governments have the primary fisheries enforcement authority over Indigenous treaty fishers. The Tulalip Tribes have also protested the charges through letters to state officials.

"From our standpoint, it appears WDFW is focusing its enforcement efforts against tribal members who typically do not have the resources to defend themselves," the letter from Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission Executive Director Justin Parker said. "WDFW is violating treaties and federal, state, and tribal laws in the process. That is no way to co-manage our fisheries resources."

A department spokesperson provided a letter it sent to the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission denying allegations that it intentionally targets tribal citizens for investigations or that it works to

undermine treaty rights or tribal sovereignty. In the Oct. 28 letter, Kelly Sussewind, director of the Fish and Wildlife Department, said it was inappropriate for NWIFC to write a letter that he alleged appeared to have been intended to influence the court case against Shopbell and Paul. He added that his agency and tribal fisheries and natural resource agencies have increasingly worked together on enforcement issues.

“The empty allegations in your letter appear to be designed to discredit these gains and are counterproductive to fostering cooperation between co-managers,” Sussewind said.

Sussewind also said the department disagreed with the court’s ruling and Skagit County’s decision not to appeal. Moreover, he said, the agency believed the state had jurisdiction in the matter and that Paul and Shopbell’s treaty rights were improperly applied.

Mike Faulk, a spokesman for Inslee, said his office hadn’t seen the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians resolution, but that the governor was aware of the “complex and lengthy cases.”

“We expect and will continue to encourage the [Fish and Wildlife Department] to operate in a professional, fair and respectful manner,” he said.

While it’s unclear if the appeals from groups like Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians and Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission will result in an investigation or broader changes, Galanda said the result of Paul and Shopbell’s case and attention from it might make the Fish and Wildlife Department more hesitant to pursue cases against tribal citizens that interfere with tribal sovereignty.

“They might think twice about further violating treaty fishing and territorial rights,” he said. “But that doesn’t mean that they won’t come back and do that again.”

‘I would do it all over again’

Before the investigation, Shopbell and Paul’s business was booming. And, according to Shopbell and Galanda, tribal treaty fishers were finally getting fair prices for their catches. But the business failed in the wake of the investigation, Galanda said, because few people wanted to be associated with a business that was facing public legal scrutiny.

Since then, Galanda and Shopbell said no other Indigenous people have stepped in to fill the void on a similar scale left when Shopbell and Paul’s business failed. That has meant tribal fishers are once again confronting depressed prices for their catches, they said.

But Shopbell, who in 2020 was elected to the Tulalip Tribes’ Board of Directors, said he would fight the charges again if it meant fortifying treaty rights and sovereignty. He believes the result of the case, despite the loss of a multimillion dollar business and years of stress from court hearings, was a positive for Washington tribes.

“I’m telling you, I lost everything. ... I’m OK with that, if that’s what it takes,” he said. “I would do it all over again if I had to. That’s how much I care about our treaty rights and how much it means to me, and knowing what our ancestors went through to preserve those.”

Shopbell said he’ll continue to push for the state to respect tribal treaty rights. Ultimately, he hopes his case prompts Washington tribes to be assertive when dealing with the state to protect tribal sovereignty and treaty rights.

He said he recently bought a crab fishing boat and is looking forward to using it with his family. Someday, he added, he might even try to resurrect his wholesale seafood distribution business.

For now, he’s excited to get back out on a boat with his family and teach his kids about harvesting crab and the treaty that guarantees their right to fish as their ancestors had.

	“That’s part of healing for me,” Shopbell said. “It’s not the money. It’s getting back and doing what I love to do. There’s nothing better than being on the water. We worked hard to preserve this.”
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HEADLINE	04/04 States sue: halt end to Title 42 border order
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/4/states-sue-halt-biden-ending-border-order-stopping/
GIST	<p>Three Republican-led states filed a lawsuit Monday seeking to stop President Biden from ending the pandemic border-emergency order that had helped block illegal immigrants’ path into the U.S., saying he moved too rashly.</p> <p>Arizona, Louisiana and Missouri said that even the administration expects to see a massive surge of illegal immigrants rushing to take advantage of relaxed COVID-19 rules.</p> <p>The states also said it’s illogical for Mr. Biden to decide that the pandemic has eased enough to end the COVID rules at the border, but at the same time to maintain vaccine mandates or masking requirements for airplane passengers.</p> <p>“The Title 42 Revocation thus stands as a radical outlier — seemingly the only COVID-19-based restriction the Administration sees fit to end,” said Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich, Louisiana Attorney General Jeff Landry and Missouri Attorney General Eric S. Schmitt.</p> <p>Title 42 is the name of the authority the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention used in March 2022 to give Homeland Security the power to immediately expel illegal immigrants, without giving them a chance to make asylum claims or other demands that would lead to them being released.</p> <p>Border experts say Title 42 helped blunt the worst of the current wave of illegal immigrants.</p> <p>It was a rare get-tough policy begun under the Trump administration to survive into the Biden years, drawing rare praise from Republicans and fierce denunciations from immigrant-rights advocates within Mr. Biden’s own political camp.</p> <p>The administration announced last week it would end the policy on May 23.</p> <p>Homeland Security has said it is anticipating up to 18,000 illegal immigrants a day will rush the border, more than double the current pace, already itself a record.</p> <p>The three states said the effects of that surge will hit communities at the border and the interior, as the administration catches and releases people.</p> <p>They said such a momentous decision should have gone through the usual regulatory process, with public notice and comment. But the administration took a shortcut and said the decision falls under “foreign affairs” and “good cause” exceptions.</p> <p>The states pointed out that the Trump administration did go through the correct regulatory process in implementing Title 42 in 2020.</p> <p>Administration officials say they are “following the science” in revoking Title 42 powers.</p> <p>They say the rate of coronavirus infections has dropped enough that the border doesn’t represent a risk, and they point to taxpayer-funded vaccination efforts for border jumpers as a way of mitigating the risk further.</p> <p>Legal experts had anticipated the states’ lawsuit, and say there’s a good chance judges will side with the states, at least in the near term. That would mean a delay of the May 23 date for lifting Title 42 restrictions.</p>

HEADLINE	04/04 Study: Covid deaths double poor counties
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/4/covid-19-deaths-nearly-double-poorest-us-counties/
GIST	<p>Americans in the poorest 10% of U.S. counties were nearly twice as likely to die of COVID-19 as those living in the richest 10% of counties, according to a new study.</p> <p>The study, which the Poor People's Campaign advocacy group released Monday at the National Press Club, found that the 300 counties with the highest coronavirus death rates during the pandemic had a poverty rate of 45%, one-and-a-half times higher than in counties with lower death rates.</p> <p>According to the study, death rates in the poorest counties shot up even higher during the worst waves of the pandemic.</p> <p>Death rates were four-and-a-half times higher during the winter of 2020-2021, five times higher during the delta variant and nearly three times higher during the omicron variant.</p> <p>"Average vaccination rates are generally higher in the highest income counties than in middle-and low-income counties, however, these differences do not explain the whole variation in death rates in the later phases of the pandemic," the study stated.</p> <p>Race was tied more strongly than vaccination status to death rates, researchers found, with the poorest counties averaging more than twice the Black population of higher-income counties.</p> <p>Six researchers from the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), Howard University School of Education, the Poor People's Campaign, the Repairers of the Breach, and the Kairos Center for Religions, Rights and Social Justice collaborated on the study.</p> <p>Columbia University economist Jeffrey Sachs, SDSN president, said in a statement that the study shows how COVID-19 was "a failure of social justice" for "the poor, women and people of color."</p> <p>"The poor were America's essential workers, on the front lines, saving lives and also incurring disease and death," Mr. Sachs said. "This pandemic report aims to shed light on the unequal burden of the pandemic, and to help point the way towards a fairer, healthier and more prosperous nation."</p> <p>Looking at income and death data from more than 3,200 U.S. counties, the study found that several of the counties with the highest death tolls were in sparsely-populated areas of Georgia, Texas and Virginia.</p> <p>Hancock County, Georgia, where the median income is \$31,860 and 73% of the population is Black, had a death rate of 1,029 per 100,000 people.</p> <p>In Texas, tiny Motley County has a median income of \$3,859 and a COVID-19 death rate of 1,000 per 100,000 residents. About one-fifth of the population is Hispanic.</p> <p>Emporia, an independent city in Virginia surrounded by Greensville County, has a death rate of 917 per 100,000 people and a median income of \$27,063.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/05 Ukraine: worst atrocities yet uncovered
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/05/zelenskiy-warns-of-worse-atrocities-yet-to-be-uncovered-in-ukraine-as-west-vows-more-russia-sanctions
GIST	<p>Worse atrocities than those discovered in Bucha are likely to be uncovered in other areas seized from Russian invaders, president Volodymyr Zelenskiy has warned, ahead of his appearance at the UN security council on Tuesday.</p>

As he built support for an open investigation into the killings in Bucha, Zelenskiy said: “And this is only one town. One of many Ukrainian communities which the Russian forces managed to capture. Now, there is information that in Borodyanka and some other liberated Ukrainian towns, the number of casualties of the occupiers may be even much higher.” The town of Borodyanka lies 25km (16 miles) west of Bucha.

The president accused Russia of trying to “distort the facts” about the alleged atrocities and claimed it was “already launching a false campaign to conceal their guilt in the mass killings of civilians in Mariupol”.

“They will do dozens of stage interviews, re-edited recordings, and will kill people specifically to make it look like they were killed by someone else,” he said. “Probably, now the occupiers will try to hide the traces of their crimes. They did not do this in Bucha when they retreated. But in another area it is possible.”

The scale of the killings around Kyiv is still unclear. Ukraine’s chief prosecutor, Iryna Venediktova, has said 410 civilian bodies were recovered in the greater Kyiv area after Russian troops withdrew, while the mayor of Bucha, Anatoly Fedoruk, said the town had buried 280 people in mass graves because its cemeteries were under fire. Zelenskiy, who visited Bucha on Monday, said there was information to suggest more than 300 people were killed and tortured there.

Europe’s worst conflict in decades, sparked by Russia’s invasion on 24 February, has already killed 20,000 people, according to Ukrainian estimates. The UN refugee agency said on Monday more than 4.2 million refugees had fled the country.

Earlier, Ukraine’s foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, said evidence of civilian killings in Bucha were just the “tip of the iceberg”. Speaking at a joint press conference with the UK foreign minister, Liz Truss, he said the “horrors of Bucha, Mariupol, and other places” demand “serious G7 and EU sanctions”.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said on Monday that Vladimir Putin and his supporters would “feel the consequences” of events in Bucha and that western allies would agree further sanctions against Moscow in the coming days.

Joe Biden’s national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, said new US sanctions against Moscow would be announced this week. The US State Department said it was supporting an international team of prosecutors and experts to collect and analyse evidence of atrocities.

Biden has called for the Russian president to be tried for war crimes, saying: “We have to gather the information. We have to continue to provide Ukraine with the weapons they need to continue to fight, and we have to get all the detail [to] have a war crimes trial. This guy is brutal and what’s happening in Bucha is outrageous.”

The European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, said the EU was ready to send investigations teams to Ukraine to document alleged Russian war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Russia has denied any accusations related to the murder of civilians and claimed it would present “empirical evidence” at the UN security council meeting on Tuesday to prove its forces were not involved.

Russian forces pulled back from areas around the capital Kyiv in the face of unexpectedly lethal and mobile Ukrainian resistance using western anti-tank weaponry. Moscow painted the withdrawal as a goodwill gesture at peace talks, which last convened on Friday. Negotiators had been due to convene on Monday, but neither side has given an update on the talks.

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HEADLINE	04/05 Day 41 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/05/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-41-of-the-russian-invasion

- **US president Joe Biden called the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, a “war criminal” and said he would [call for a war crimes trial](#)** as global outrage over claims of civilian killings by Russian soldiers in the **Ukraine town of Bucha** continued to mount. “We have to gather the information. We have to continue to provide Ukraine with the weapons they need to continue to fight, and we have to get all the detail [to] have a war crimes trial. This guy is brutal and what’s happening in Bucha is outrageous,” he said on Monday.
- **The European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, said the EU was ready to send investigations teams to Ukraine** to document alleged Russian war crimes and crimes against humanity. [She said](#) she had spoken to **Ukraine president Volodymyr Zelenskiy** about the “dreadful murders” that were uncovered over the weekend.
- **Zelenskiy visited Bucha, about 45km north-west of Kyiv, wearing body armour and surrounded by military personnel on Monday.** He spoke of the death and destruction in the recently liberated towns of Stoyanka, Irpin and Bucha. “The cities are simply ruined,” he said, adding that authorities had begun an investigation into possible war crimes. Zelenskiy said there was information to suggest **more than 300 people were killed and tortured in Bucha** alone.
- **The Ukrainian president addressed western leaders, criticising what he described as delayed action against [Russia](#).** “Did hundreds of our people really have to die in agony for some European leaders to finally understand that the Russian state deserves the most severe pressure?” he asked. Referring to military aid, he said: “If we had already got what we needed ... we could have saved thousands of people.”
- **[Zelenskiy](#) will address the United Nations security council on Tuesday**, after he said it was in Kyiv’s interest to have an open investigation into the killing of civilians in Ukraine.
- **Ukraine’s foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, said evidence of civilian killings in Bucha were just the “tip of the iceberg”.** Speaking at a joint press conference with the UK foreign minister, Liz Truss, he said [the “horrors of Bucha, Mariupol, and other places”](#) demand “serious G7 and EU sanctions”.
- **The bodies of five civilians, including the mayor, were found with their hands tied in the village of Motyzhyn, 45km west of Kyiv,** Ukrainian authorities said. The mayor, Olga Sukhenko, her husband and their son, were abducted by Russian troops on 24 March, police said. “They tortured and murdered the whole family of the village head,” Anton Herashchenko, an adviser to Ukraine’s interior ministry, said.
- **Ukraine’s prosecutor general, Iryna Venediktova, said the town of Borodyanka would be the worst-hit by Russia’s invasion in the Kyiv region.** Speaking on national television, Venediktova said the number of victims in **Borodyanka, about 23km west of Bucha, [would be higher than anywhere else](#)** but did not provide further details.
- **Zelenskiy said the country is preparing for “even more brutal activity” of Russian forces in the east and south of Ukraine.** “We know what they are going to do in Donbas,” he said. Ukraine’s defence ministry spokesperson Oleksandr Motuzyanyk said [Russia](#) is attacking the cities of **Rubizhne and Popasna** in the eastern Luhansk region, while preparing an attack on the city of **Severodonetsk and working to capture Mariupol**.
- **US national security adviser Jake Sullivan appeared to corroborate the claims, saying “Russia is repositioning its forces to concentrate its offensive operations in eastern and parts of southern Ukraine”** and this new phase of Russia’s invasion “could be measured in months or longer”.
- **The Red Cross said that a team sent to help evacuate civilians from Mariupol is being held by police in Russian-controlled territory.** The team was stopped on Monday while carrying out humanitarian efforts to help lead a safe passage corridor for civilians and “is being held in the town of **Mangush**, 20km west of Mariupol,” ICRC spokeswoman Caitlin Kelly told AFP.
- **Russia has backed a new, self-proclaimed mayor of Mariupol, who is collaborating with Russian forces,** Reuters reported.
- **Washington is working on more economic sanctions against Russia** to be announced this week, Sullivan said, adding that “options that relate” to the country’s lucrative energy industry are on the table.
- **UK foreign secretary Liz Truss said she will be working with allies to ban Russian ships from western ports, crack down on Russian banks, and agree to “a clear timetable to eliminate our imports of Russian oil, gas and coal”.**

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The US will request Russia’s removal from the UN human rights council. During a visit to Romania, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the US ambassador to the United Nations, called for the international body to suspend Russia. • The head of the office of the Ukrainian president, Andriy Yermak, said a “very big historical mistake” was made when “specific Allied countries and specific leaders started a game with Russia” 14 years ago at the Nato summit in Bucharest, according to comments published on the website of Ukraine’s presidential office.
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HEADLINE	04/04 Bucha survivors come out of hiding
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/04/why-did-they-do-this-to-us-buchas-survivors-come-out-of-hiding
GIST	<p>Those seeking a quiet life, tired of the price and pace of Kyiv, once came to live on Vokzal’na Street in the small town of Bucha, 17 miles north-west of Ukraine’s capital. It was known as “little Switzerland”, so comfortable was the living.</p> <p>Today, Vokzal’na is burned out, its broken homes and the churned-up military hardware littering the muddy quagmire of what was the road make up some of the defining images of the devastation wrought by Vladimir Putin’s war.</p> <p>It is barely conceivable that anyone could have survived what was thrown at Vokzal’na from both sides during what was clearly a vicious battle on the road to Kyiv.</p> <p>There is not a brick unscathed nor a patch of mud that will not have been mixed with blood. But, now that the Russians have gone, Vokzal’na’s residents are emerging from their cellars, tired, tearful and angry.</p> <p>“There was 70 of the armoured vehicles, like tanks, and Russian soldiers walked alongside,” he said. “It took about 40 minutes for them to pass our house. I watched and counted. And then the Ukrainians launched their shells at the Russians.”</p> <p>Zelenskiy warns of worse atrocities yet to be uncovered in Ukraine as west vows more Russia sanctions</p> <p>The first took out Savenko’s shed in his large back garden. It was the first of many. The horribly exposed armoured vehicles tried to turn around, in panic, as the next, more accurate wave of shells rained down upon them.</p> <p>Thirty minutes of devastation ensued. Russian bodies were strewn across the road, hot metal flew through the air, smashing every window, enveloping the trees in fire, and turning the burning vehicles white hot.</p> <p>Across Savenko’s 30-metre long hedge alone, nine devastated armoured vehicles were left burnt out, filling the air with the acrid smell of burning oil and metal.</p> <p>Those Russians that could escape did. But an hour after the Ukrainian assault, the Russians came back to retrieve their dead – and to entrench themselves in Vokzal’na’s gardens and what was left of its buildings, establishing points from which to send their artillery fire at the Ukrainian defenders. It would be a long and cruel occupation.</p> <p>“We were in our cellar the whole time,” Savenko said. “The Russians set up their weapons and a fire in the front garden. One came down to the cellar and saw us. He said to be quiet. He said he was a nice guy but his colleagues would get us on our knees and shoot us. They took our phones and said, no fires, as if we could make some sort of signal.”</p> <p>Standing outside her home at No 31, gripping a note, with tears streaming down her face, Zinaida, 62, had been in her cellar since 5 March.</p>

On Sunday, the Ukrainian army found the body of her son-in-law just around the corner. She was just about to tell her daughter and 16-year-old grandson, who had been evacuated and until now only knew that he was missing. There isn't any internet connection in Bucha, typical of all the towns that Russia has targeted in its "special military operation".

"My daughter asked him to leave their basement to pick some things up from a neighbour's house. Here is her note, he had it with him: cigarettes on the shelf near the sofa, pills, groceries, slippers, a blanket. He left the house on 4 March. He walked just 20 metres from the house and the Russians killed him. No warning, no reason. He was such a good father, his son loved him so much. He is disabled. How can I tell them?"

On the same side of the road at No 27, a new-build block of apartments, Ivan, 55, and Helen, 50, who did not want to give their surnames, were cleaning up the glass, shell fragments and unexploded armaments outside on the communal porch. It was something they had done throughout the ordeal. They had only moved in three months earlier. Of the eight families that had lived here, they were the only ones to stay, having nowhere else to go.

"We tidied all the time, swept up. We don't have a basement anyway. We wanted to show we were not scared, I don't know," said Ivan. "But you see that high apartment block over there? Well there was a sniper and he was angry that we weren't scared and cowering. So he fired shots over our head."

On the floor of his neighbour's apartment, among the glass and metal, was blood, as there was on the kitchen table, still wet. It was the blood of Russian soldiers who had been hiding inside, evidenced by the discarded food wrappings.

Across the road, at No 32, there is nothing left other than the remnants of some walls. Next door, a frame of what was a garage. Volodymr Matsyk, 62, his wife, Lydmyla, and their two sons, Artem, 33, and Bodgan, 20, stayed in the cellar as their world above was blown away. They have been evacuated. But their neighbour, Dymytro Zamogyl'ny, 56, said an injured Russian soldier who had been taken there to receive medical assistance had not been so fortunate. "A bomb landed right on the house, killing him," he said.

At No 23, Oleksandr Loza, 87, had been found lying on the ground in his pyjamas, unable to move, after the initial fighting of 27 February. He has since been evacuated.

The next-door neighbours' handsome green roof at No 25 was caved in by a direct hit. Its owners, cowering in the cellar, Oleksandr, 66, and Galayno, 65, who had been the chief carers to their elderly friend next door, miraculously escaped.

Bucha is a blackened, hollowed out mess. Bodies of civilians continue to be discovered.

On Monday, officials took away five bodies of men seemingly tied up and shot by the Russians in the basement of a summer residence for children. It was also claimed that human remains found near the town were those of Olga Sukhenk, the mayor of Motyzhyn, and her husband and son.

Visiting the town on Monday, Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, spoke on national television about what he had seen.

"These are war crimes and will be recognised by the world as genocide," he said, wearing body armour and surrounded by military personnel. "We know of thousands of people killed and tortured, with severed limbs, raped women and murdered children."

Around the corner from Vokzal'na Street, close to where 21 civilians were found scattered across one of Bucha's main roads on Saturday, Sergiy Zebencko, 57, and his wife, Helen, 49, showed the grave of their cousin, Dmytro Bernastsky, 59, in their garden.

	<p>“We found his body on 31 March, just 150 metres from us, and buried him here,” said Helen. “But we don’t even know when he was killed, maybe 10 days earlier when he was coming to see us. He had three bullets in his left leg, one to his heart and one to his lung. He was by the supermarket.</p> <p>“We want to rebury him. He was a pilot in the Ukrainian air force. We want to bury him in his uniform, it needs to happen. Why did they do this to us?”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 Putin be prosecuted for war crimes?
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/04/putin-war-crimes-accusation-ukraine-icc
GIST	<p>Joe Biden has called for the prosecution of Vladimir Putin for war crimes after the discovery in Bucha, Ukraine, of mass graves and bodies of bound civilians shot at close range. But bringing the Russian president to trial would be far from simple.</p> <p>What are war crimes? The international criminal court (ICC), the world’s first permanent war crimes tribunal, defines them as “grave breaches” of the Geneva Conventions, a set of humanitarian laws to be observed in war.</p> <p>Jonathan Hafetz, an international criminal law and national security scholar at Seton Hall University School of Law, told the Reuters news agency that the execution of civilians as alleged in Bucha was a “quintessential war crime”.</p> <p>Russia continues to deny culpability. Its defence ministry insisted on Sunday that “not a single civilian has faced any violent action by the Russian military”.</p> <p>How can a case pointing to war crimes be built? Jake Sullivan, the US national security adviser, told reporters on Monday that there were four main sources of evidence: information gathered by the US and its allies including from intelligence sources; Ukraine’s own efforts on the ground to develop the case and document forensics from the killings; material from international organisations including the UN and NGOs; and findings by global independent media with photos, interviews and documentation.</p> <p>Can Putin be held personally responsible for his troops’ actions? The prosecution could argue that Putin and his inner circle committed a war crime by directly ordering an illegal attack or knew crimes were being committed and failed to prevent them. This case may be hard to prove in isolation but if it fits a wider pattern across Ukraine, it becomes more compelling. The US had accused Russia of war crimes even before Bucha.</p> <p>Philippe Sands, a professor at University College London, told the Associated Press: “You’ve got to prove that they knew or they could have known or should have known. There’s a real risk you end up with trials of mid-level people in three years and the main people responsible for this horror – Putin, Lavrov, the minister of defence, the intelligence folks, the military folks and the financiers who are supporting it – will get off the hook.”</p> <p>Who would run such a trial? The ICC opened 20 years ago to prosecute the perpetrators of genocide and crimes against humanity. But the US, China, Russia and Ukraine are not members of the court, which has been criticised for focusing too heavily on Africa and applying “selective justice”.</p> <p>The ICC’s chief prosecutor, Karim Khan, said in February he had opened a war crimes investigation in response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Although it is not a signatory, Ukraine previously approved an investigation dating back to 2013, which includes Russia’s annexation of Crimea.</p> <p>The ICC will issue arrest warrants if prosecutors can show “reasonable grounds” to believe war crimes were committed. But there is little chance that Russia would comply and the ICC cannot try someone in</p>

absentia. The US's unwillingness to join the court is also diplomatically awkward and likely to prompt cries of western hypocrisy.

Donald Trump once told the UN general assembly: "As far as America is concerned, the ICC has no jurisdiction, no legitimacy, and no authority." His administration [announced that the US would impose visa bans](#) on ICC officials involved in the court's potential investigation of Americans for alleged crimes in Afghanistan.

But Sullivan said on Monday: "The US has in the past been able to collaborate with the international criminal court in other contexts despite not being a signatory. But there's a variety of reasons one might consider alternative venues as well."

What are these "alternative venues"?

The UN seems an obvious starting point. But one problem with going through the UN security council is that Russia is a permanent member. "It would be difficult to imagine that they would not attempt to exercise their veto to block something," Sullivan observed.

Another option might be a special tribunal organised by a group of countries. The Nuremberg tribunal was established by the US, Britain, France and the Soviet Union to hold Nazi leaders to account after the second world war.

Potential models for Ukraine could include [the tribunals set up](#) to prosecute war crimes committed during the Balkan wars in the early 1990s and the 1994 Rwanda genocide. Another example was the UN-backed special court for Sierra Leone, established in 2002 to bring to justice those responsible for atrocities perpetrated during the country's civil war in 1996.

What about a different charge?

It would be easier to prosecute Putin for the crime of aggression after he waged an unprovoked war against another sovereign country. The ICC does not have jurisdiction over Russia for the crime of aggression because Russia is not a signatory.

Last month dozens of prominent lawyers and politicians, including the Ukrainian foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, and the former British prime minister Gordon Brown, launched a campaign to create a special tribunal to try Russia for the crime of aggression in Ukraine.

How long would a prosecution take?

Probably many years. The international criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia indicted its first head of state, the then Yugoslav president, Slobodan Milošević, in 1999 and took him into custody in 2001. His trial began in 2002 and was under way when he died at the Hague in 2006.

Charles Taylor, the former president of Liberia, [was found guilty](#) of aiding and abetting war crimes and crimes against humanity for supporting rebels who carried out atrocities after four years of hearings at the special court for Sierra Leone in the Hague.

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HEADLINE	04/04 Ukraine forces face harder fight east
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/04/routing-of-russian-forces-from-kyiv-area-will-be-hard-to-repeat-in-eastern-ukraine
GIST	<p>Russia's withdrawal from around Kyiv and the north and north-east of Ukraine appears more comprehensive than most onlookers had anticipated. It will be a little while before the picture becomes definitive, but Moscow's forces are now fast retreating out of the country from the Kyiv, Chernihiv and Sumy districts, Ukrainian regional officials say.</p> <p>It is impossible to describe this as anything other than a serious reverse. Such is the haste of the exit that some units are being left behind to be mopped up by the Ukrainians. Sumy, a little over 30km from</p>

the Russian border, did not fall to the invaders, while the road to Chernihiv, which was at risk of encirclement, is now open to the capital to the south-west.

Kyiv too can breathe again: the month of danger has passed and the full withdrawal means that the capital is no longer in range of artillery fire – although it can still be struck by missiles from Belarus, if the Russians bloodily choose to launch them. And, while it may appear that a re-invasion could happen again at any time, the reality is that unless something dramatic happens elsewhere it cannot succeed.

Russia's problem is that its forces have taken significant losses from its overoptimistic, poorly planned multi-front attack. The number killed could be anywhere from 7,000 to 15,000, with wounded typically double that, from an invasion force of about 140,000. As Mark Cancian, a senior adviser at the US Center for Strategic and International Studies, [wrote last week](#), it could be that Russia has lost "about a quarter of its initial combat force".

Other estimates from western officials have suggested Russian combat effectiveness may be depleted by a fifth or a sixth, not as high perhaps but still operationally significant. The haste of the retreat acknowledges that the invaders are in many respects exhausted and need to concentrate operations, fighting street by street to take Mariupol in the south and a more conventional military campaign in the Donbas region, where Ukraine's forces are dug in.

What will happen here is less certain. Russia still has the ability and desire to attack, and its forces are pressing south of Izyum, a key strategic point, to try to envelop the Ukrainian army that faces the separatist Donetsk and Luhansk territories to the east. But it appears its forces are having less success advancing north to join up from Velyka Novosilka, 100km north of Mariupol. And after nearly seven weeks of intense fighting, it is not at all certain Russia can keep up the effort.

"If Russia wants to push back Ukraine's defenders near Donetsk and Luhansk, they will have to force them out of defensive positions Ukraine has had five more years to prepare. It will require heavy artillery support and a use of combined arms – infantry, tanks, artillery, air power – that we have not seen so far," said Ben Barry, a land warfare specialist from the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Ukraine says some Russian forces, brought up as reinforcements, are refusing to fight. On Sunday, its general staff said [two battalions of Russian forces](#) from South Ossetia, the breakaway region of Georgia, "refused to participate in combat" in Ukraine and would return to base. Although this cannot be verified for certain, there are enough reports of desertions and poor morale to believe Russian combat effectiveness is massively reduced – against an enemy determined to fight for its homeland.

Meanwhile, mercenaries from the Russian Wagner Group – whose number has been estimated at 1,000 – [have been photographed in Donetsk](#). But these are no replacement for well-trained regular forces: Wagner forces have, [struggled in countries such as Mozambique](#), where they briefly tried to battle an insurgency in the Muslim north in 2019.

Ukraine will recognise the nature of the war has changed. Its supply lines, in particular weapons from the west, have become less fraught. But despite limited counter offensives, there is no sign its forces have the capability to push back the Russian forces where they have made gains in the east and the south. Calls for jets and tanks have gone unheeded, although [Australia has promised to send Bushmaster armoured personnel carriers](#), which will help with mobility.

If Russia chooses to dig in, then the military balance – which typically favours the defender on a 3-1 ratio – is reversed. If its forces can complete the bloody recapture of Mariupol, the invaders will control the south between Crimea and the occupied Donbas – and with Odesa blockaded, ensure Ukraine has no access to the sea.

Ukraine has not been defeated, although it faces a fight on its hands in the Donbas. But without a change on the battlefield it may once again be partitioned de facto, against its will.

HEADLINE	04/04 Kremlin reverts to denial as a response
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/04/kremlin-reverts-to-type-in-response-to-alleged-war-crimes-in-ukraine
GIST	<p>As horrifying evidence of the execution of civilians emerged from the Ukrainian town of Bucha and elsewhere at the weekend, the Russian government took a familiar tack: deny, deny, deny.</p> <p>No matter that some of the explanations were contradictory, with state television amplifying claims that the images of dead civilians in Bucha were both staged and that the civilians had been killed by Ukrainians themselves.</p> <p>In recent years, the Russian government has developed a familiar playbook in response to allegations of bombing runs in Syria, the downing of the MH17 airliner in east Ukraine, the Salisbury poisonings or acts of violence targeting Chechen civilians during the conflicts there in the 1990s and 2000s.</p> <p>“I think it’s similar to what it was in connection to shocking reports from Aleppo or Idlib – meaning that state-sponsored media is always ready to deny war crimes allegations as ‘fakes’,” said Tanya Lokshina of Human Rights Watch.</p> <p>“But until recently, the country had a few independent media left and now it’s practically none.” The aggressive debunking of “fakes” has become a key component of Russia’s propaganda war in Ukraine.</p> <p>On Monday, the government said it would begin an investigation into the events in Bucha – not for the alleged war crimes that took place as more than 280 people were killed in the small town, but into the distribution of “fakes” for discrediting the Russian army.</p> <p>And government agencies and television hosts have got to work pointing fingers in every direction – except for at the Kremlin.</p> <p>The quick denials and alternative theories resemble those of a crisis PR agency. Speed and shamelessness are prized above all else.</p> <p>“The behaviour of the government ... has changed over the years,” said Ilya Shepelin, a journalist for the banned TV Rain who has reported extensively on Russian news agencies and misinformation. “Ten years ago it would have been easier to keep quiet about an event like Bucha and pretend that nothing was happening and then slowly begin speaking about it.”</p> <p>But with the advent of the internet, and the availability of news on Telegram channels, pretending nothing has happened has become more difficult.</p> <p>And in that case it is important to muddy the waters as quickly as possible, even if the result is somehow incoherent.</p> <p>“Now, immediately you have to get out front saying it’s all staged, it’s all invented. And if it’s not all staged and invented, then we’re not guilty for it,” he said. “These two ideas are contradictory ... but the most important thing is to fight back on all fronts. And hope that one of them catches on with the audience.”</p> <p>Watch Russian TV and that’s what you’ll see.</p> <p>On Sunday evening, Vladimir Soloviev, a top Russian television host, told millions of listeners that the “war against us has entered a new phase. They’re leading us along the Yugoslavia scenario. Now they’ll cook up the scenario of a Srebrenica. We’ll soon be accused of genocide.” He also accused the British of being behind the “provocation”.</p>

	<p>Another popular talking point, noted by BBC Monitoring's Francis Scarr, was that the town Bucha was chosen as the site for the provocation for its resemblance to the word "butcher". Just days earlier, a host noted, Biden had called Putin a "butcher".</p> <p>And while those narratives played out before millions of Russians on television, state investigators warned anyone spreading independent information about Bucha could face up to 15 years in prison.</p> <p>"The perjury spread by the Ukrainian side is another provocation, a cynical lie and is aimed at discrediting the Russian army in the conditions of the information and propaganda war unleashed by the west," said the Russian general prosecutor. "The circumstances of the creation and public dissemination of this deliberately false information under the guise of reliable reports will be established, and they will certainly be given an appropriate criminal legal assessment."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 Bucha bodies set difficult test for West
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/04/the-bodies-of-bucha-have-set-a-difficult-test-for-the-west-ukraine
GIST	<p>Sometimes a war crime is so egregious, and so fully reported, that it cannot but stir the conscience of the west. The My Lai massacre in 1968, Srebrenica in 1995, the British suppression of the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya, the Rwanda genocide of 1994, the Disappeared of Argentina under the junta in the 1980s or even the dispatches about bodies piled high in Bulgarian town squares by the US war reporter Januarius MacGahan in 1876 were all moments when the defence of ignorance has to be abandoned.</p> <p>Even then the truth is more complicated and the west did not always act. Bill Clinton regretted he did not respond to the murders of Tutsis in 1994, saying he did not "fully appreciate the depth and the speed with which [Rwandans] were being engulfed by this unimaginable terror". Srebrenica was arguably only the culmination of ethnic cleansing that had been going on for three years. My Lai, revealed two years after the event, only provided further momentum to a pre-existing US anti-war movement. The scale of the British repression of the Mau Mau rebellion was only truly documented decades afterwards by a Harvard historian Caroline Elkins in her book Britain's Gulag.</p> <p>So it is not a foregone conclusion that the pictures of Ukrainian civilians murdered with their hands tied will lead to towns such as Bucha becoming a spur for action when Nato and G7 ministers meet this week in Belgium. Measures such as suspension of Russia from the UN human rights council may have some symbolic value, but the big test is further European economic sanctions that may not just hit Russia but also the EU.</p> <p>Russia is clearly nervous, drawing upon its Syrian playbook to claim the bodies strewn in the streets were part of an inside job staged by Ukrainian defence forces for consumption by gullible western reporters. Russia's deputy ambassador to the UN Dmitry Polyansky claimed: "Today's Ukrainian neo-Nazis are fully respecting the old Goebbels Nazi provocation school and trying to shift the blame on Russia."</p> <p>On the basis that attack is the best form of defence, Moscow tried to call for an emergency meeting of the UN security council on Monday, but met resistance from the UK, the current president of the council. Russia's diplomatic activity is less designed to sow doubt among westerners than to keep hold of the neutrals, such as China, India, Israel and even Turkey. It is also an act of political self-preservation. Studies of decades of Serbian denials of Srebrenica suggest no self-doubt can be countenanced.</p> <p>For Volodymyr Zelenskiy, by contrast, this has to be a turning point, the moment to create a convulsion in Europe, and finally to pile so much pressure on Germany that it stops being the drag anchor of Europe about sanctions. From Ukraine's perspective, if Germany shifts, the other countries also hesitating about tougher sanctions, such as Austria and Italy, would fall into line. Italy suggested as much.</p>

For Zelenskyy, a European embargo on Russian energy, even if it were initially only oil, cannot come soon enough. Latest estimates suggest Russia will earn up to \$320bn from oil and gas exports until the end of 2022, which is a third more than a year earlier. The Russian rouble rose on Monday, reversing earlier losses, and the Moex benchmark stock index climbed to levels last seen before Russia sent thousands of troops into Ukraine. These are not the signs of an economy close to collapse.

In an opening salvo, Zelenskyy invited the two architects of the now defunct 2014-15 Minsk peace process – Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy – to come to Bucha to see how the road to appeasement turns into this horrific cul-de-sac.

His ambassador to Germany, Andriy Melnyk, has also stepped up his weeks-long assault on Russia's friends in Germany. He said in one interview: "You see these atrocities and you are still not ready to do anything to make Putin lose his appetite for these atrocities. How can you sleep if you find strong words after these pictures, but do nothing? What else should happen so that the toughest sanctions are put on the table? Chemical attacks, or what is it you are waiting for?"

Many say his unflinching criticism of Germany – his latest broadside was to claim there was a web of Russophile contacts around the German president Frank-Walter Steinmeier – is ultimately counterproductive. But Melnyk cannot stop himself from naming those he regards as the guilty men. In Tagesspiegel, for instance, he named people connected to Steinmeier such as Jens Plötner, the foreign policy adviser to Chancellor Olaf Scholz, and the state secretary in the ministry of foreign affairs, Andreas Michaelis (the former German ambassador to the UK).

He claimed many important ambassadors also shared Steinmeier's closeness to Russia. Looking at the front pages of the German press documenting Putin's war crimes, and many German opinion polls, the ambassador clearly feels the political class is behind the public in what Germany and its economy is willing to sacrifice. Steinmeier has himself now issued a mea culpa, saying: "We clung to bridges that Russia no longer believed in and that our partners warned us about. My assessment was that Vladimir Putin would not accept the complete economic, political and moral ruin of his country for his imperial madness. Like others I was wrong."

But the roadblock is no longer that there is anyone in Germany willing to defend the country's 20-year conscious decision to make itself dependent on cheap Russian energy. That may have been an orthodoxy a year ago during the debates about Nord Stream 2, but now has become heresy. The Free Democratic party vice-chair Johannes Vogel wants the Bundestag to conduct an inquiry to analyse how and why such a "misguided" and "naïve" Russia policy could have been pursued by previous governments. The chair of the Greens in the Bundestag, Britta Hasselmann, also blames the "failed energy policy" under Merkel and Gerhard Schröder. Even Patrick Pouyanné, the chairman and CEO of TotalEnergies admits that Germany's addiction to cheap Russian gas had "yes, sort of created this monster".

But the blame game about past misreadings of Putin is less important than what Germany is prepared to do now. So far, Berlin has persistently resisted the exclusion of Russian banks from the international payment system as well as a temporary ban on imports of Russian oil and gas. Pouyanné says it will take four to five years to end Europe's dependence on Russian gas.

Scholz, due in the UK later this week, insists Germany will back further sanctions in response to the war crimes, but other ministers insist this cannot include a total energy ban.

A full embargo will end up damaging Germany more than Russia, Scholz argues, and he has rounded on a team of economic modellers for irresponsibly claiming a full embargo would lead only to a 3% fall in German GDP.

In taking up this position Scholz has the backing of Germany industry and finance.

The chief executive of Deutsche Bank, Christian Sewing, was the latest to warn about the consequences if Russian energy supplies were cut off. Already grappling with soaring inflation, Sewing said Germany

	<p>would face “a further deterioration of the situation” if imports or deliveries of Russian oil and natural gas were stopped. “A clear recession in Germany would presumably be inevitable.” The chief executive of the chemical group BASF, Martin Brudermüller, pointed out that Russia provided 55% of German natural gas consumed, and 35% of its oil. “Do we want to destroy our entire economy with our eyes wide open?”</p> <p>That view is reluctantly echoed by the economic affairs minister, Robert Habeck, who warns that an immediate import ban would lead to “supply bottlenecks next winter, economic slumps, high inflation and hundreds of thousands of people losing their jobs”. The best he could offer was independence from Russian coal by the autumn and near independence from oil by the end of the year. He could set no date for gas.</p> <p>The danger is the debate in Germany is becoming very polarised and entrenched. Ben Moll, an LSE professor and the informal head of the group that produced the modelling, is now suggesting a compromise: an embargo on oil and a tax on gas, with measures to cushion the blow for the poorest.</p> <p>Virtually anything, he says, is better than Germany’s lack of response.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/03 Lessons China taking from Russia war?
SOURCE	https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2022/04/what-lessons-china-taking-ukraine-war/363915/
GIST	<p>Operation Desert Storm was a turning point in modern Chinese military history. As military planners with the People’s Liberation Army watched U.S. and allied forces make short work of the world’s fourth-largest military (on paper), equipped with many of the same systems as the PLA, it became <u>obvious</u> that China’s quantitatively superior but qualitatively lacking massed infantry would stand no chance against the combination of modern weaponry, C4ISR, and joint operations seen in Iraq. The result was <u>new military concepts</u> and over two decades of often-difficult reforms, which produced the modern, far more capable, “<u>informationized</u>” PLA of today.</p> <p>Today, the PLA is no doubt closely observing its Russian contemporaries in Ukraine as they under-perform in <u>multiple areas</u>, from failing to take key targets or claim <u>air supremacy</u> to running low on fuel and supplies and possibly experiencing morale collapse, and surely taking away lessons that will shape its own future. Of note, Russia’s experience appears to have confirmed many of China’s recent assumptions behind its investments, such as the utility of <u>unmanned</u> aerial systems in high-intensity conflict, as well as the necessity for the PLA’s 2015 reforms, which aim to fix many of the issues driving Russian failure that the PLA recognizes in itself.</p> <p>Of the many issues that have contributed to Russia’s physical battlefield woes in Ukraine, one of the most important has been the lack of effective joint or combined arms operations, widely considered essential to any effective modern fighting force. Russia’s poor level of coordination between its various services and branches can only be generously described as <u>incompetent</u>. For example, it has repeatedly failed to provide effective air support to its ground forces or <u>deconflict</u> its air and air-defense forces to avoid friendly fire.</p> <p>The PLA has long had its own serious issues with joint operations. Traditionally dominated by the Army, the PLA had little success developing a truly joint force until a series of sweeping <u>reforms</u> in 2015 that replaced the former Army-dominated system with a series of joint theater commands. The PLA is thus aware of its own shortcomings and taking steps to fix it, but likely remains far off from being able to conduct truly effective, seamless joint operations. Efforts to conduct joint <u>exercises</u> are becoming more common, but most senior PLA leaders are still relatively inexperienced with joint operations, and even new officers typically do <u>not</u> receive joint education below the corps level. Further, it remains to be seen how far these reforms will go or to what extent they will “stick;” indeed, one reason the PLA did not attempt these reforms until 2015 was because of strong institutional pushback from the Army, whose leaders wished to retain their dominant status.</p> <p>To China, the Ukraine invasion will reinforce the importance of joint and combined arms operations, while also making clear that such operations are highly difficult to conduct in practice. Russia’s stumbles may</p>

give the PLA pause as to whether it is truly ready for all the joint elements that a successful Taiwan seizure would require, including close coordination between sea, air, and land forces.

Another issue which has contributed to Russia's military woes is the low [quality](#) of its conscript force. Indeed, Ukraine has even turned images of Russian POW conscripts being allowed to call their [mothers](#) into a weapon in its information warfare. While some militaries, such as Israel, have managed to maintain a high-quality conscript force, a full-time professional force is generally considered to hold numerous substantial advantages, which is why most of the Western world now uses a voluntary recruitment model. Despite the copious hyper-masculine recruiting videos which so excited [certain](#) Western politicians, Russia has struggled to attract enough voluntary recruits to move away from its current system of 12-month conscription.

Despite some recent success in recruiting a higher-quality, more-educated voluntary force, the PLA has [likewise](#) failed to move away from conscription. It presently requires about 660,000 two-year conscripts, many lacking even partial high-school education, to fill out its ranks. While this does not bode well for the PLA's ability to conduct complex operations, one area where the PLA may have an advantage over its Russian counterparts is in the area of motivation. The Russian conscripts are not just poorly trained, but also suffer from low morale. Many among the invasion force did not know why they were going to Ukraine, or even that they were going to Ukraine at all. By contrast, the PLA places heavy emphasis on personnel political education, and Chinese conscripts have been raised from an early age to believe in the necessity of "liberating" Taiwan. Still, the PLA is surely watching with concern as a conscript force with at least some similarities to its own fares so poorly, and will likely redouble their campaign to attract more, and preferably higher-quality, voluntary recruits.

Russia also allowed its adversary to dominate the information environment. Due to a combination of overly optimistic assumptions about the political weakness of its foe and logistical reliance on its target's own communications networks, Russia never launched the long-feared effort to take down Ukrainian communications networks. Putin's strategists wrongly believed that its own messaging and rapid military advances would go viral across these networks and aid in collapsing the Ukrainian state. As well, many of Russia's units turned out to need access to Ukrainian civilian networks for their own operations.

Instead, the Zelenskyy regime [turned](#) the tables on Russia, winning the information war inside both Ukraine and the West, and in so doing, transforming the greater war. Deft Ukrainian government messaging and a mobilized civilian populace created a new sense of domestic unity, as well as mobilizing essential military aid and historic economic sanctions from a widened network of global allies. In turn, Russian use of civilian networks made it susceptible to [intercepts](#) and geolocated targeting of its units. The PLA has streamlined coordination between its cyber, electronic warfare, space, and information warfare efforts through the recent creation of the Strategic Support Force, indicating it recognizes the importance of information dominance. It can be expected to redouble its efforts at cyber/information warfare, as well as encrypted communications, to ensure its own operations don't suffer the same flaws.

Another ongoing issue has been Russia's serious problems with poor logistics. The [sight](#) of broken-down or abandoned vehicles has become common as Russian forces run out of fuel and other vital supplies. To its credit, the PLA has also been rapidly [reforming](#) and modernizing its logistical system as part of the same broad set of 2015 reforms. As part of these [reforms](#), the PLA has emphasized its logistics [organizations](#) and created the Joint Logistics Support Force. This force's [training](#) has focused on cooperation with other branches of the PLA, and it has cut its teeth [training](#) to establish supply lines during natural disasters. In 2018, the JLSF launched its first major [exercise](#), dubbed "Joint Logistics Support Mission 2018," featuring medical drones, helicopter-dropped refueling depots, and operations in harsh and remote terrain.

However, while the outward manifestation of many of the issues faced by the Russian military appear to be logistical in nature, the true heart of the issue may be [corruption](#). There are [reports](#) that before the invasion Russian military officers sold off their fuel and food supplies, and that these corrupt practices may be responsible for the [stalling](#) of a Russian tank column outside Kyiv. In this regard, the PLA has much to fear. Corruption has [plagued](#) the PLA for decades, with some PLA officers bluntly [stating](#) in 2015

that it could undermine China's ability to wage war. [Reportedly](#), more than 13,000 PLA officers have been punished in some capacity for corruption since Xi Jinping took power, including more than a hundred generals. This was a [particular problem](#) in the logistics sector, where there are more opportunities for corruption and links to the civilian economy.

Yet, despite the reorganization of the PLA and widespread prosecution of corruption cases, it still [appears](#) to be a major issue. Anti-corruption efforts are [ongoing](#), with Chinese Gen. Zhang Youxia recently calling for innovative measures to keep up the fight. But the fact that Fu Zhenghua, the man brought in to take down the corrupt former security chief Zhou Yongkang, is himself now under [investigation](#) for corruption does not bode well for the long-term effectiveness of China's efforts. The troubled invasion of Ukraine provides a stark real-world example to Xi, the CCP, and PLA about the impact corruption can have on military effectiveness, and will no doubt cause them to redouble their anti-corruption efforts with a newfound urgency. However given its similar authoritarian system and emphasis on career advancement through [patronage](#), systemic corruption may be baked into the system.

Finally, there is the strategic issue of Beijing's reaction to the global sanctions that have hit the Russian ruble and economy. The swift and severe economic retaliation of the U.S., EU, and others took Moscow by surprise. Even more unexpected was the rapid [withdrawal](#) of almost 500 global corporations, pushed on by an effective effort at naming and shaming them into acting to protect their own brands. A longer-term effort [targeting](#) essential elements of Russia's defense industry will hamstring it for years.

While China will [benefit](#) from Russia's increasing reliance on its goods and services, Beijing can be expected to retool its geo-economic strategy to reduce its vulnerability to a similar nightmare scenario. For example, it will likely redouble its efforts to promote its [Cross-Border Interbank Payment System](#)—an alternative to the SWIFT international banking system—among its strategic partners and foreign aid recipients in the developing world.

Likewise, China's recent "[Dual Circulation](#)" economic strategy [appears](#) to be aimed at countering a decoupling from China's trade partners. Further, Beijing has surely observed how easy it was for corporations to withdraw from Moscow. If China is to be exposed to the risk of global sanctions and corporate withdrawal, so too are countries and corporations exposed to dependence on the world's second-largest economy, and thus the government will likely take efforts to make any sanctions or corporate turn against China as painful a prospect as possible. Either way, policymakers in Washington need to understand that the sanctions being used today against Russia are unlikely be as effective the next time around, as China is not just a different economy, but also will learn from the current conflict and adjust accordingly.

For all these valuable lessons, there is little doubt that China has been watching the ongoing conflict with no small amount of chagrin. Chinese leaders are [reportedly](#) surprised and unsettled by the poor military performance of its Russian partners, Ukraine's resistance, and the level of solidarity from the international community. The image of a much smaller state, against all odds, successfully resisting a larger neighbor surely sits uneasily in the psyches of CCP apparatchiks and PLA officials. It also counters the narrative of overwhelming force and grim inevitability Beijing has sought to instill in the psyches of the Taiwanese people. It is notable that early [attempts](#) by Chinese state media to [capitalize](#) on the Ukraine invasion in precisely this fashion, illustrating how the United States will surely abandon Taiwan when the chips are down, quietly ceased after the initial days of the war, when it became apparent that the U.S. was not, in fact, abandoning Ukraine. Beyond purely psychological factors, Ukraine also offers a blueprint for successful resistance via asymmetric warfare very similar to Taiwan's proposed Overall Defense Concept, perhaps giving a jolt to a plan that most analysts agree offers Taiwan its best chance of success against the PLA but has [stalled](#) out in the face of bureaucratic resistance.

While China and the PLA will surely watch Ukraine closely and try to take away the correct lessons, there is one uncomfortable parallel which China may be unable to avoid by the very nature of its authoritarian system. The runup to the Ukraine invasion featured multiple strategic [miscalculations](#) by Putin, driven at least in part by him surrounding himself with the yes-men who inevitably cling to authoritarian leaders, eager to please and afraid to speak truth to power. This was obvious in the visibly [uncomfortable](#) reaction

	of Russia's SVR (foreign intelligence) chief as he was publicly pressured to agree with Putin in the days leading up to the war, as well as in the sackings and arrests of multiple military and intelligence officials after the war turned poorly. Authoritarian leaders have systemic problems in gaining reliable intelligence, oftentimes magnified by their overconfidence in their own singular understanding of a situation. As China continues its slide away from a system of intra-Party consensus toward a one-man cult of personality in which dissenting views are increasingly unwelcome, Xi is bound to encounter the same problem. It is unclear whether Xi will learn this lesson from Putin, or make his own similar miscalculations in the future towards China's own neighbors.
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HEADLINE	04/04 DOH: 1,458,424 cases, 12,515 deaths
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/coronavirus/article260096395.html
GIST	<p>The Washington state Department of Health reported 621 new COVID-19 cases Monday.</p> <p>As of Monday, the state's preliminary death tally was 12,515 — unchanged since March 29. The confirmed death tally as of March 18 was 12,458.</p> <p>“DOH is still experiencing delays in reporting cases, hospitalizations, and deaths as a result of prior slowdowns in our data systems during the Omicron surge,” the agency said on its COVID-19 website dashboard. “We are clearing these backlogged cases, hospitalizations, and deaths as resources permit.”</p> <p>The state reported 551 cases Sunday and 758 cases Saturday. The statewide case total from the illness caused by the coronavirus stood at 1,458,424 cases on Monday.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 Cancellations down but flight issues linger
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Airlines-reduce-cancellations-but-US-flight-17056969.php
GIST	<p>Air travel in the United States improved Monday after a rocky weekend that left thousands of flyers stranded by thunderstorms in Florida, technology problems at the busiest domestic airline and labor problems at another carrier.</p> <p>However, airlines that do much of their flying in Florida were still struggling Monday, especially Spirit Airlines.</p> <p>And airlines were bracing for another round of storms that were forecast to hit the Dallas area — home to American and Southwest — Monday night.</p> <p>Airlines scrubbed more than 650 U.S. flights by late Monday afternoon, according to tracking service FlightAware.com. That followed the cancellation of more than 3,500 flights — about one in every 13 — over the weekend.</p> <p>Thunderstorms led the Federal Aviation Administration to limit flights over much of Florida and briefly halt flights at several airports in the state on Saturday. That caused ripple effects across the country for the rest of the weekend, and some travelers reported having to wait before they could be put on another flight.</p> <p>“It's spring-break season, so unfortunately there is no worse place to have bad weather than Florida right now,” Henry Harteveltdt, a travel-industry analyst for Atmosphere Research, said Monday. “The airlines are scrambling to get people where they want to go, they're working to get planes to and from Florida. It's going to take a couple days.”</p> <p>On Monday, Spirit, which is based in Miramar, Florida, canceled more than 250 flights, or just over 30% of its schedule. The airline said it was recovering from bad weather in Florida and elsewhere over the previous several days.</p>

	<p>“It takes time to get our crews and planes back into place after multiple days of weather and restrictions,” Spirit spokesman Erik Hofmeyer said. “We’re seeing improved operating conditions, and we expect to move toward resuming our normal operations over the next few days.”</p> <p>JetBlue Airways, which flies frequently between Florida and the Northeast, canceled about 140 flights, or 13% of its total for the day.</p> <p>Southwest Airlines, which operates more domestic flights than any airline, was doing much better on Monday — about 60 cancellations, 1% of its schedule, after scrubbing more than 900 flights, or about 13% of its total, Saturday and Sunday. The airline also suffered what it called intermittent technology problems over the weekend.</p> <p>Southwest's unusual point-to-point route map means that many of its planes stop in Florida at some point during a normal day. By contrast, American, Delta and United run so-called hub-and-spoke networks in which flights radiate outward from a few key airports. That keeps planes in one part of the country insulated from bad weather in other places.</p> <p>Alaska Airlines, the fifth-largest U.S. carrier, canceled about 40 flights or 5% of its schedule Monday. Over the weekend, the airline seemed to blame the pilots' union. Off-duty pilots have picketed at airports and an investor conference by the Seattle-based airline to protest the slow pace of contract negotiations over the past three years.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 Alaska cancels flights, impacts thousands
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/boeing-aerospace/alaska-airlines-cancels-dozens-more-flights-as-pilot-shortage-continues/
GIST	<p>As of 11 a.m., Alaska Airlines has canceled 40 more flights Monday, affecting nearly 6,000 passengers, with additional cancellations possible.</p> <p>Alaska spokesperson Alexa Rudin said two of those cancellations were due to mechanical issues while the rest were caused by staffing shortages.</p> <p>As a pilot shortage continues to impact the air carrier’s business, the cancellations included 27 flights arriving at or departing from Seattle-Tacoma International Airport on Monday, according to data from flight tracking firm Flightaware.</p> <p>In addition, Flightaware shows Alaska’s regional sister carrier Horizon canceled seven flights Monday, including one from Sea-Tac to Anchorage and two from Bellingham to Sea-Tac.</p> <p>Stranded passengers across the country continue to be frustrated by an inability to reach Alaska customer support.</p> <p>Scott Henderson along with his wife and two small children flew to Raleigh, North Carolina, last week for a wedding and was scheduled to fly back to Seattle Tuesday on a flight that got canceled Sunday.</p> <p>“Anyone who calls Alaska, including us and some of our family who are here, gets a recording saying you can expect a 10-hour wait time to talk to someone,” Henderson said via email. “When you go to Alaskaair.com and try to change your flight, it tells you nothing is available currently and you should try calling them! Quite the vicious cycle.”</p> <p>With no contact from Alaska, Henderson had to spend money on additional car rental, extend his stay on the east coast and then book a new flight home via United.</p>

“So far we are well over \$3000 into new expenses for this,” Henderson said. “Alaska has dropped us flat, and we have no idea if we’re going to get any kind of compensation from them. We don’t even know how to find out.”

Alaska’s Rudin said the airline’s policy is that for a crew-related cancellation where a passenger needs to spend the night, “they are eligible to be reimbursed for reasonable expenses including hotel, food and transportation.”

And for a crew-related cancellation that results in the passenger cancelling their trip, “they would be eligible for an airfare refund.”

The airline urged passengers scheduled to travel to check their flight status either on the Alaska app or at alaskaair.com/flightstatus.

Rolling cancellations

Alaska Airlines had canceled 73 flights Sunday, with more than 9,800 passengers affected.

The Sunday cancellations included 33 flights at Sea-Tac airport.

On Saturday, the airline had canceled 92 flights due to the pilot shortage, with another 18 flights significantly delayed by what officials said was a mix of weather, mechanical and “other standard issues.” At Sea-Tac on Saturday, the airline canceled 27 departures and 32 arriving flights.

[On Friday](#), the airline canceled 68 flights at Sea-Tac and more than 120 overall, affecting at least 15,300 travelers.

Every U.S. airline is facing the impacts of a national pilot shortage, brought on by reductions in staffing during the pandemic and a quicker than expected rebound in air travel this year.

However, Alaska has been hit worse than most.

With pilots now so in demand, they can choose where to work more easily. Alaska, currently in an increasingly bitter standoff with the union representing its pilots over a new contract, has lost dozens of pilots this year to other major U.S. carriers.

Despite the ongoing problem, Alaska spokesperson Alexa Rudin said via email that the major travel disruption this weekend should ease in the next few days.

“A significant portion of today’s cancels are clean up from the cancels yesterday that displaced aircraft and crews,” she wrote. “This situation will continue to improve as we resolve those impacts over the next couple days.”

Constance von Muehlen, Alaska’s chief operating officer, said in a statement Saturday the airline is “doing everything we can” to support affected passengers.

Alaska said it was notifying passengers and doing what it could to get them to their destinations as quickly as possible.

“We know the sudden cancellation of their travel plans is frustrating — we apologize to all of our guests who we let down,” read a statement posted on the airline’s website.

“Re-accommodation may include a later flight or an alternate route,” said Rudin. “We are also doing our best to notify guests whose travel is impacted as early as possible.”

“When we can’t accommodate them on Alaska, we have relationships with other airlines to help get them to their destination where possible,” she said. “We also work with guests on a case-by-case basis to care for their specific needs.”

Impossible to reach customer service

However, those desperate for support by phone were out of luck.

Alaska is short-staffed throughout its operation, with shortages of not only pilots but also flight attendants and call-center representatives.

When 90-year-old Dorothy Case called Alaska’s customer service line Saturday, a recorded message told her to expect a hold time of “more than 10 hours.”

Anxious about her scheduled flight from Tucson, Arizona, to Seattle on Wednesday, which requires synchronizing complicated family arrangements, Case wants to find out if it’s still on but couldn’t reach the airline.

“We really need to know so we can plan,” said Case.

Kelly Pollock, with her family on a spring break trip to Disneyland, heard the same dispiriting 10-hour hold message when she called customer service at 5:30 a.m. Saturday after notification that their 8 a.m. flight home to Chicago through San Francisco was canceled.

After repeated calling, Pollock eventually got through to Alaska’s reservations line. The airline was able to put her husband, who needed to get back for work, on a United flight to Chicago on Saturday.

To get Pollock and her two teenagers home together, the best Alaska could offer was a 6 p.m. flight Sunday on American.

On Saturday, the three were stuck for the 34-hour delay in a hotel at LAX, which Pollock paid for.

She’s expecting a refund for the hotel cost from Alaska, but the reservations agent said she had to talk to customer service about that. Given the estimated hold time, that was impossible. And Pollock said both the airline’s online chat option and its text option were unavailable “due to volume.”

Pollock said she normally flies United but chose Alaska because of a bargain first-class ticket price. “I don’t think I’ll be flying Alaska again,” she said.

Management at odds with pilots

An internal Alaska Air memo Friday indicated the reasons for the chaos.

“Our operational performance today was below the level many of us expect,” Capt. John Ladner, Alaska’s vice president of flight operations, wrote in a Friday email to pilots. “The primary driver for our performance right now is the shortage of pilots we have available to fly versus what was planned when we built our April schedule in January.”

Ladner cited the level of attrition as a major factor, and said Alaska was offering 150% pay to pilots willing to pick up extra flights.

The airline’s management has been locked in contract negotiations with the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA) union for three years. Hundreds of Alaska pilots picketed Friday near Sea-Tac Airport and at the airline’s other hubs on the West Coast.

ALPA has warned the company repeatedly that Alaska’s situation is particularly acute.

	<p>In a message to members Friday night, the union’s executive council said pilots have been stretched to their limit for months and the current cancellations were predictable.</p> <p>“Pilot staffing for April is low,” the message read. “All of you saw it coming.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 Jury: \$8M to injured woman in Amtrak crash
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/tacoma-jury-awards-8m-to-woman-injured-in-2017-amtrak-cascades-derailment/
GIST	<p>A federal jury in Tacoma has awarded \$8 million in damages to a woman injured when the Amtrak Cascades 501 line derailed in 2017, spilling passenger cars onto Interstate 5, killing three people and injuring dozens.</p> <p>The jury found in favor of Emily Torjusen on Monday after a four-day trial before U.S. District Judge Benjamin Settle. The jury awarded Torjusen \$2.5 million for past noneconomic compensatory damages and \$5.5 million for future noneconomic damages.</p> <p>According to court pleadings, Torjusen was traveling south from Seattle to Vancouver to spend the Christmas holidays with her family. She was a passenger in the seventh car behind the engine on the train’s inaugural run on its new rebuilt Point Defiance Bypass route when the train derailed at high speed near DuPont, Pierce County.</p> <p>The National Transportation Safety Board, which investigated the accident, said in a final report issued in 2019 that multiple failures contributed to the crash, but placed primary blame on Sound Transit, which it said had not done enough to mitigate the danger of the curve where the train derailed.</p> <p>The maximum safe speed at that curve was determined to be 30 mph, but there was only a single sign warning the engineer to slow down. Investigators determined the Amtrak Cascades was traveling at 79 mph when it arrived at the curve.</p> <p>According to a trial brief filed by her attorneys, Torjusen, then 20, was looking at her phone when she “felt the whole car shaking.”</p> <p>“Ms. Torjusen remembers metal coming toward her and then she was knocked unconscious,” wrote attorneys Scott Levy and Anthony Petru of Oakland, California, law firm Hildebrand, McLeon & Nelson.</p> <p>“When she woke up, it was pitch black and she heard people crying and screaming,” the brief said. “Ms. Torjusen was stuck in the dirt and could not move her legs.”</p> <p>In a statement issued Monday after the verdict, Levy said Torjusen’s life was “irreparably changed due to Amtrak’s negligence.”</p> <p>Torjusen, who was a sophomore at the University of Washington, suffered a fractured collarbone and “major emotional and cognitive consequences,” but regained the use of her legs. She has since graduated, Levy said, but continues to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and post-concussion syndrome.</p> <p>“This jury verdict is an appropriate recognition of the significant psychological and cognitive injuries suffered by Emily,” he said.</p> <p>Olivia Irvin, a spokesperson for the National Railroad Passenger Corp. in Oakland, said Amtrak “cannot provide comment” on the verdict.</p> <p>Including Torjusen’s \$8 million verdict, Amtrak has paid more than \$46 million connected to the Amtrak Cascade derailment, including verdicts of \$4.5 million and \$17 million in 2019, \$10 million in 2020, and \$6.9 million in 2021.</p>

HEADLINE	04/04 NTSB lab receives China jet 'black boxes'
SOURCE	https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-04-04/china-jet-mystery-may-yield-clues-as-black-boxes-arrive-in-u-s
GIST	<p>Investigators trying to figure out why a Boeing 737-800 plunged to the ground in China last month could gain key clues within days from the jet's black boxes, which were sent to the U.S. for analysis.</p> <p>"I'd expect within a week the investigation team would have the information," said Neil Campbell, a retired air-safety investigator at the Australian Transport Safety Bureau who worked on the Boeing 737 MAX crash in Indonesia in 2018. "For an accident like this, the recorders are critical."</p> <p>The two flight recorders, built to withstand high-speed impacts, have become central to solving the March 21 mystery considering the China Eastern Airlines flight disintegrated into more than 40,000 pieces when it slammed into a hillside.</p> <p>Both Boeing and China Eastern have much hanging on an investigative breakthrough.</p> <p>More than 200 of China Eastern's Boeing 737-800 planes have been grounded for two weeks now because there was no obvious reason why the jet entered a sudden nosedive, killing all 132 people on board. And any evidence that clears or implicates Boeing could be critical for the U.S. manufacturer in China, where it's working to resume deliveries of the 737 MAX jet after a three-year halt.</p> <p>Results from the black box analysis could come in one to two weeks, said Mike Poole, chief executive officer of Ottawa-based Plane Sciences, which helps countries develop air-accident investigation capabilities.</p> <p>Poole said he's never known data to be totally irrecoverable because of the force of a crash but said it still takes time to download it, convert it into useful information and analyze the details correctly.</p> <p>China Eastern Flight 5735 from Kunming to Guangzhou was cruising at about 29,000 feet when it suddenly dived at high speeds. It slammed into a forested hillside about 100 miles from its destination.</p> <p>Fears alleviated</p> <p>The dispatch of the black boxes to the National Transportation Safety Board laboratory in Washington, D.C., alleviates concerns, at least to some degree, that strained U.S.-China relations might hamstring the investigation into the disaster.</p> <p>The exact status of the two recorders remains unclear. NTSB spokesman Eric Weiss declined to go beyond the investigation agency's statements on Friday.</p> <p>The safety board has said it was assisting the Civil Aviation Administration of China with the download of the cockpit voice recorder at its lab in Washington, but wouldn't be releasing any information about its contents. The NTSB also hasn't commented on whether the download was successful.</p> <p>The flight-data recorder, which captures hundreds of parameters monitoring an aircraft's path and systems, was also brought to Washington by the Chinese, a person familiar with the process said last week.</p> <p>The NTSB has declined to comment on whether it has downloaded the contents of the data recorder.</p> <p>Chinese authorities have also allowed a seven-person team sent by the NTSB to arrive in China, according to the official Xinhua News Agency. In another sign of cooperation, investigators have been given the green light to avoid quarantine and start work immediately if they limit contact with those outside the probe, the NTSB said.</p>

	<p>Even when flight recorders are severely damaged, it's still possible to extract information from the individual memory chips inside, said Joe Hattley, a former aircraft accident investigator who worked on the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 in 2014. He now teaches the subject at University of New South Wales Sydney's School of Aviation.</p> <p>"I'd be surprised if we didn't get everything from those flight recorders," said Hattley.</p> <p>Damaged module</p> <p>The devices are designed to withstand the force of coming to a full stop within two meters from a collision at 310 miles per hour, according to retired investigator Campbell.</p> <p>Photographs of one of the China Eastern black boxes indicates the module that houses the flight information sheared off its chassis.</p> <p>In order to retrieve the data, investigators would need to open the module, access the circuit board, replace the cable and then plug it into a new chassis, said Campbell. That's work only a handful of entities around the world, including the NTSB, can do, he said.</p> <p>"It's not something you want to be doing in anger for the first time," Campbell said. "It is important to have the right expertise and knowledge."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 Colman Dock suffers ferry hard landing
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/bainbridge-ferry-out-of-service-after-hard-landing-in-seattle/
GIST	<p>With wind gusts touching 40 mph, it's been a rough Monday on Puget Sound for Washington's largest ferry system. Three routes — Port Townsend to Coupeville; Bainbridge to Seattle; and Vashon to West Seattle — struggled with weather delays, equipment malfunctions and a hard landing into Seattle's Colman Dock, disrupting the timing of all three routes.</p> <p>Just after 7:30 Monday morning, the Kaleetan ferry sailing between Seattle and Bainbridge slammed into one of two "wing walls" at Colman Dock in downtown Seattle. The wooden walls act as funnels, feeding the massive boats gently into the docking slips. While it's common for the ferryboats, which weigh thousands of tons, to rub against the walls, the Kaleetan's "hard landing" on Monday crunched the wooden beams, said spokesperson Ian Sterling.</p> <p>"The dock did what it was supposed to do, which is it broke before the boat did," said Sterling.</p> <p>No injuries have been reported. But as a result of the landing, Washington State Ferries closed the damaged slip and removed the Kaleetan from service Monday morning.</p> <p>The Kaleetan returned to service Monday afternoon, but Colman Dock was reduced to just one functional slip for both the Bainbridge and Bremerton routes as crews investigated the damage. As a result, riders could anticipate delays in loading and unloading, said Sterling.</p> <p>It's unclear whether the landing was the result of the day's weather, which brought white-capped waves and stormy skies. Sterling said the crew of the Kaleetan will be questioned and drug tested. Such hard landings used to be more common, said Sterling, but are rare today. "Tens of thousands of [landings] go as planned, but every now and then you get a fender bender," he said.</p> <p>At the same time, a cable issue Monday morning shuttered the Fauntleroy ferry dock in West Seattle, which runs service to Vashon Island and Southworth, for the first half of Monday. The cable's malfunction impacted crews' ability to raise and lower the car ramp leading onto the boats. Service returned in the afternoon.</p>

	<p>Additionally, stormy seas forced the ferry system to cancel routes between Port Townsend and Coupeville, on Whidbey Island, on Monday morning. The passage can sometimes be subjected to punishing winds coming through the Strait of Juan de Fuca, making sailings unsafe. Sailings returned to service Monday afternoon.</p> <p>Crew shortages and maintenance issues have plagued the ferry system in recent months, causing a slew of cancellations and delays. Those issues persist, as evidenced by the reduced service between Seattle and Bremerton, and Edmonds and Kingston on Monday morning, which were both operating with only one boat as opposed to the normal two.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 Seattle leaning utility poles shutter street
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/all-lanes-of-fourth-avenue-south-closed-in-seattles-sodo-neighborhood-due-to-leaning-utility-poles/
GIST	<p>All north- and southbound lanes on Fourth Avenue South, between South Dawson Street and South Industrial Way, are closed Monday afternoon due to leaning utility poles on the Fourth Avenue South Bridge, according to the Seattle Department of Transportation.</p> <p>A loud explosion on the west side of the bridge was reported at about 3:13 p.m., said Detective Valerie Carson with the Seattle Police Department.</p> <p>The cause of the incident is still under investigation, but it appears to be weather related, according to Mariam Ali, a spokesperson for SDOT. There were fallen wires across the tracks.</p> <p>No injuries have been reported.</p> <p>Monday's high winds caused several power outages throughout the day, affecting more than 7,000 customers in the area, according to the Seattle City Light power outage map. Crews are investigating whether the damaged utility poles are responsible for outages in Seattle's Sodo and Georgetown neighborhoods Monday afternoon, said Jenn Strang, media relations manager for SCL.</p> <p>Power in both neighborhoods was fully restored around 8:30, according to a tweet from SDOT.</p> <p>Crews estimated that repairs would be completed by Tuesday mid-morning, Strang said in an email.</p> <p>There's no estimated time for reopening. SDOT is urging drivers to use alternate routes, warning of delays. Drivers, Ali said, should remember to treat downed traffic signals like a four-way stop.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 Judge blocks Air Force discipline over vax
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/judge-blocks-air-force-discipline-over-vaccine-objections/
GIST	<p>TOLEDO, Ohio (AP) — A federal judge has blocked the military from disciplining a dozen U.S. Air Force officers who are asking for religious exemptions to the mandatory COVID-19 vaccine.</p> <p>The officers, mostly from Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio, along with a handful of airmen and reservists, filed a lawsuit in February after their exemption requests were denied.</p> <p>U.S. District Court Judge Matthew McFarland in Cincinnati granted a preliminary injunction last Thursday that stops the Air Force from acting against the officers, airmen and reservists until their lawsuit is resolved.</p> <p>The plaintiffs accuse the Air Force of using a double standard when it comes to approving exemption requests, saying it had allowed thousands of medical and administrative exemptions but only a handful for religious reasons.</p>

	<p>Last week, a federal judge in Texas barred the Navy from taking action for now against sailors who have objected to being vaccinated on religious grounds.</p> <p>U.S. District Judge Reed O'Connor had, in January, issued a preliminary injunction preventing the Navy from disciplining or discharging 35 sailors who sued over the Navy's vaccine policy while their case played out. A week ago, O'Connor agreed the case could go forward as a class action lawsuit and issued a preliminary injunction covering about 4,000 sailors who have objected on religious grounds to being vaccinated.</p> <p>Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin last year made vaccinations mandatory for service members, saying the vaccine is critical to maintaining military readiness and the health of the force. But members of Congress, the military and the public have questioned if the exemption reviews have been fair.</p> <p>Those who refuse the vaccine can face discipline up to being discharged from the service.</p> <p>The officers who filed the lawsuit in Ohio said they had followed their chain of command and each had talked with an Air Force chaplain to determine the sincerity of their beliefs.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 Lawsuit: convert hotel to homeless housing
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/eastside/group-sues-kirkland-king-county-over-plan-to-convert-hotel-to-permanent-supportive-housing-site/
GIST	<p>A group is suing the City of Kirkland and King County over the county's plan to convert a Kirkland hotel to a permanent supportive housing site for people who are chronically homeless.</p> <p>Keep Kids Safe, a group of Kirkland residents and parents whose children attend schools near La Quinta Inn & Suites, allege in the lawsuit that city and county officials didn't hold public meetings that were required before King County bought the site in March. Because there was an insufficient public process, the group says, the decision to house the site at the La Quinta location should be voided.</p> <p>King County paid \$28.1 million for the 121-room building, according to the Department of Community and Human Services, with money from Health Through Housing program financed by a 0.1-cent sales tax to buy hotels, motels and other sites with single rooms for emergency and permanent housing.</p> <p>The lawsuit, filed last week in Snohomish County Superior Court, also names the King County Council as a defendant. Spokespeople for King County and the King County Council on Friday said attorneys are reviewing the lawsuit but declined to comment further.</p> <p>Keep Kids Safe alleges Kirkland and King County officials "met in secret" to discuss a potential site — violating the state's Open Public Meetings Act, which requires all meetings public agencies' governing bodies be open to the public.</p> <p>"It's important for governments to provide due process and transparency," said Mark Lamb, the attorney representing the group. "Due process isn't when you say 'we have made the decision' but listen to commentary afterward. It's a short-circuiting of state law and a short-circuiting of their own ordinances and processes."</p> <p>In a statement, the City of Kirkland said city officials are confident all state and local laws were followed in connection with the proposed permanent housing site. The statement noted that the purchase and timing of the La Quinta property were negotiated exclusively by King County and the property owner.</p> <p>"Chronic homelessness is a societal problem that includes Kirkland," the city said in a statement. "We are confident our community can help respond to this urgent problem while also protecting the public health, safety, and welfare, particularly with respect to our children attending nearby schools."</p>

	<p>Leo Flor, director of the Department of Community and Human Services, said last month that King County doesn't hold public meetings until the county and seller have an agreed-upon price, to avoid the risk of the county paying too much.</p> <p>Opponents say one of their main concerns is that the site shares a property line with Eastside Preparatory School, a private school for fifth- through 12th-grade students, and is close to several other schools and childcare providers. A petition on Change.org opposing the proposed plan has generated approximately 3,700 signatures.</p> <p>The Kirkland City Council earlier this year said it would support King County's plan, under the condition that the city can review and approve a facility operator and resident screening criteria, and develop safety and security plans, among other terms.</p> <p>"The City has always made it clear that any City approval of this permanent supportive housing project will depend on binding agreements approved by the City Council which address these important health, safety, and welfare needs in binding and enforceable ways," the city said in a statement.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 Memorial Everett officer killed in line of duty
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/memorial-held-for-everett-police-officer-killed-in-line-of-duty/
GIST	<p>EVERETT — A procession and memorial service was held Monday for Everett police Officer Dan Rocha, who was fatally shot while confronting a suspect in a parking lot late last month.</p> <p>The memorial service for Rocha, 41, was held at Everett's Angel of the Winds Arena. Rocha started working for the city of Everett as a parking enforcement officer in 2017 and became a fully commissioned police officer in 2018. He is survived by a wife and two sons, police said.</p> <p>During the memorial Mayor Cassie Franklin said she had struggled to find the right words, the Daily Herald reported.</p> <p>"This tragedy has shaken our community to its core," she said.</p> <p>Authorities said Rocha was shot in the head at least twice after he and suspect Richard Rotter got into an altercation March 25 in the parking lot of a Starbucks. The shooter fled in a car. Police arrested Rotter following a three-vehicle crash about two miles away.</p> <p>Rotter's last known address is in Kennewick, and court records show he has prior felony convictions in Benton and Franklin counties. At the time of his arrest, he was wanted on two misdemeanor warrants for a domestic-violence assault Dec. 7 and a hit-and-run in July out of Benton County. He was the subject of an officer safety alert issued by Kennewick police, according to the probable-cause statement.</p> <p>As a felon, Rotter cannot legally possess firearms. Prosecutors said Rocha witnessed him moving guns between cars.</p> <p>Rotter, 50, has been charged with first-degree murder and unlawful possession of a firearm in connection with the officer's death and is being held at the Snohomish County Jail in lieu of a \$5 million bond.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 UK travelers face Easter delays
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/easter-delays-for-uk-travelers-as-covid-cancels-flights/
GIST	<p>LONDON (AP) — British travelers going abroad for the Easter holidays faced disruptions Monday as two main carriers, British Airways and easyJet, canceled dozens of flights due to staff shortages related to soaring cases of COVID-19 in the U.K.</p>

Budget carrier easyJet grounded 62 flights scheduled for Monday after canceling at least 222 flights over the weekend, while British Airways said some three dozen out of its 115 flights canceled Monday were due to pandemic-related problems.

An easyJet spokesman said it is “experiencing higher than usual levels of employee sickness” as a result of high rates of COVID-19 infections across Europe.

The airline added that the number of cancellations “represents a small proportion” of the total of more than 1,600 flights planned for Monday.

Several of the British Airways cancellations were made at the last minute due to staff calling in sick, and about 25 others were a result of a decision taken in recent weeks to reduce its overall flight schedule.

“While the vast majority of our flights continue to operate as planned, as a precaution we’ve slightly reduced our schedule between now and the end of May as we ramp back up,” the airline said.

“Aviation has been one of the industries worst hit by the pandemic and airlines and airports are experiencing the same issues rebuilding their operations while managing the continuing impact of COVID,” it added.

The Easter school holidays, which start this week, are the first time many families in Britain have booked trips abroad after two years of restrictions. All remaining virus measures, including mandatory self-isolation for those infected and testing requirements for international travel, were binned in February and March as part of the U.K.’s “living with COVID” plan.

But coronavirus cases across the U.K. have soared again with the rapid spread of the more transmissible omicron BA.2 variant, reaching record levels last week when official figures showed that some 1 in 13 people had the coronavirus.

Heathrow Airport, Europe’s busiest, said it had anticipated delays this week because it expected to see the largest number of people traveling since the March 2020 lockdown.

The travel disruptions were made worse Monday after Eurotunnel said that services for travelers to Calais in France were delayed by hours due to a train that “stopped temporarily in the tunnel”.

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HEADLINE	04/04 Seattle leaders on homeless camps fires
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/seattle-leaders-address-ballard-encampment-fires-residents-frustrations
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Seattle Police are investigating a vehicle fire at a Safeway in Ballard.</p> <p>It happened over the weekend, and fire fighters said it was intentionally set.</p> <p>This year, our ‘Project Seattle’ team has been reporting on the growing number of fires near or at homeless encampments.</p> <p>Ballard area resident Rudy Pantoja, is one of many we have spoken to in the last few months.</p> <p>"I'm sick of hearing lip service from Dan Strauss, the mayor and the Seattle City Council," he said. "We're going to get on it? How many years has this taken?"</p> <p>Those KOMO has spoken to, all have similar messages to city leaders: deal with issues, like encampment fires that are affecting their community and quickly, so that people do not get hurt.</p>

In focus now, is the car fire at the Safeway in Ballard at Mary Avenue NW and NW 85th Street. While Seattle Police have not connected the car fire to the homeless encampment, residents said the nearby camp is tied to similar incidents.

Pantoja did get to ask this district's Councilmember, Dan Strauss, a question in a virtual town hall held last week.

"Rudy was instrumental in getting the chief of police out to the Safeway up on 85th and 15th," Strauss said. "I'll give you a call. Let's work together and again, the neighbors across the street from Safeway, they have my number. Let's get to work together. As I've said a couple times in this call, we're switching gears from planning to implementation at this time."

In a statement sent to KOMO Monday, Strauss said, "Speaking with Seattle Fire Department today, they confirmed the fire was intentionally set and is currently under investigation. At 85th and Mary, I will continue coordinating with neighbors, Seattle Fire Department, Seattle Police Department, homelessness outreach services, and the Mayor's Office to bring the attention needed to this location. I have worked with these same partners to address the Ballard Commons in the West, Woodland Park in the East, and we are now working from the north and south – from 85th and Mary in the North, and from Leary Way in the South."

"My office has received multiple reports of dangerous fires in Ballard and throughout the city," said Sara Nelson, Citywide Councilmember. "I went to the site of the encampment fire on 15th Ave. NW and NW 51st Street right next to Les Schwab which burned a utility pole and took out that business's internet service for over 12 hours. This is blocks away from an encampment adjacent to Bardahl Oil where there have been multiple fires. I understand and share my constituents' frustration about the serious threats to lives and livelihoods in their neighborhoods and I have conveyed to the Executive the sense of urgency I feel to address this issue and prevent more fires, which I know is a focus of his and his team."

A spokesperson for Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell's office told KOMO Monday about some of the work they have done, adding that these issues cannot be solved overnight, *Mayor Harrell is bringing a new urgency to address the homelessness crisis. However, problems created over decades cannot be solved overnight. Sustainable change requires sustainable solutions and processes.*

The mayor spent his first 90 days in office developing improved and streamlined systems to better help people out of tents and off sidewalks and into shelter and housing with services. In the past several months, the mayor has driven a renewed focus on addressing encampments in parks and the right-of-way. While progress is being made, the City can only act as fast as the resource capacity we have available.

Coordinated by the Mayor's Office, the City continues to lead multiple efforts directly addressing impacts of the homelessness crisis in Ballard, and the Mayor's Office is evaluating and refining current RV enforcement practices. Clean City crews twice weekly visit approximately eight encampment areas in Ballard to collect trash and needles.

This year, the HOPE Team has made 34 referrals to shelter from the Ballard area including recent outreach at Woodland Park. Outreach partners have included REACH, Scofflaw Mitigation, and Catholic Community Services.

SPU (Seattle Public Utilities) has done a recent RV remediation at NW 47th St. And 8th Ave NW as well as 3 "Geo Cleans" cleaning 8 sites. A geo clean is a swift and consistent response to mitigate ongoing trash and debris from RVs scattered throughout City geographical areas (neighborhoods). Geo cleans, unlike RV remediations, do not require interdepartmental response such as a site inspection or RV relocation to mitigate trash and debris from the right-of-way.

	<p><i>SPU has a litter abatement route in Ballard, that covers 82 blocks between NW Market St. Between 15th Ave NE and 3rd Ave NW. There is also a twice a month RV pump out pilot conducted in Ballard, servicing RVs along 9th Ave NW/NW 46th St, and 8th Ave NW/43rd St.</i></p> <p><i>Mayor Harrell continues to partner with Councilmember Dan Strauss on the specific challenges facing Ballard. With most service contracts now housed with the Regional Homelessness Authority, the mayor will also continue to collaborate with the RHA to review existing needs and provide additional solutions as new challenges arise.</i></p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 Storm: tens of thousands without power
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/traffic-lights-off-power-goes-out-around-western-washington-amid-windstorms
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Traffic lights are going dark and thousands are without power as strong winds batter Western Washington.</p> <p>Washington State Patrol reports several intersections in Pierce and Thurston counties where traffic lights have shut off. Some lights in the South Seattle area are affected as well.</p> <p>According to Puget Sound Energy, more than 32,000 customers are without power as of 10 p.m. Monday.</p> <p>On its website, PSE wrote: <i>"Strong winds, heavy rains and snow in some areas are causing power outages around Western Washington. Hard-hit areas include Pierce and Thurston counties; today's power outages are the result of fallen trees and limbs due to strong winds and rain-saturated soils. The saturated ground can destabilize trees, making them more susceptible to collapsing.</i></p> <p><i>Our local storm bases are open to coordinate restoration efforts. Our crews are assessing damage and making repairs as conditions are safe—they will work through the night as conditions allow. Additional outages may occur as stormy weather continues.</i></p> <p><i>Our first step in restoring power is damage assessment: getting a look at what's been done to the system and determining the extent of repairs that are needed. The process takes time and crews may be delayed, especially if unsafe weather or impassable roads remain an issue."</i></p> <p>In Seattle, around 1,343 customers are affected. Crews have been dispatched to hundreds of reported outages in the area.</p> <p>The cause of most of these outages has not been identified yet, but some are confirmed to be caused by fallen power lines and trees.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 CDC comprehensive review, evaluation
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/04/health/cdc-re-evaluation-covid.html
GIST	<p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will undergo a monthlong comprehensive review and evaluation, a first step in modernizing its systems and processes and transforming it for the future, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the agency's director, announced on Monday.</p> <p>The move follows an unrelenting barrage of criticism regarding the agency's handling of the pandemic over the past few months. The review will be conducted by Jim Macrae, who served as acting administrator of the Health Resources & Services Administration for two years and has held other senior positions at the federal Department of Health and Human Services, of which the C.D.C. is a part. Mr. Macrae will start his assignment on April 11.</p>

“The lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic, along with the feedback I have received inside and outside the agency over the past year, indicate that it is time to take a step back and strategically position CDC to support the future of public health,” Dr. Walensky said in an email to agency employees.

Three senior C.D.C. officials — the acting principal deputy director, Dr. Deb Houry; the chief operating officer, Robin Bailey; and the chief of staff, Sherri Berger — will gather feedback on the structure of the agency and “solicit suggestions for strategic change,” Dr. Walensky said.

At the end of what she described as a “collective effort,” the agency will develop new systems and have a plan for how the agency should be structured.

A C.D.C. spokesperson said that the agency has worked to speed up data reporting and scientific processes over the past year, but that more needs to be done, including finding “new ways to adapt the agency’s structure to the changing environment.”

Dr. Walensky said the review will focus on the agency’s core capabilities: the public health work force, data modernization, laboratory capacity, health equity, rapid responses to disease outbreaks and preparedness, both in the United States and worldwide.

“Over the past year, I have heard from many of you that you would like to see CDC build on its rich history and modernize for the world around us,” Dr. Walensky said in her email. Thanking her employees, she said, “I am grateful for your efforts to lean into the hard work of transforming CDC for the better.”

The C.D.C. has long been revered for its methodical, scientific approach to improving public health around the world. Scientists outside the United States were trained by agency experts, and its standards have been embraced and emulated globally.

But the agency’s infrastructure was neglected for decades, like the nation’s public health system generally, and the pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges. Early on, the C.D.C. made key mistakes in testing and surveillance — for example, famously fumbling design of a diagnostic kit sent to state laboratories.

Officials were late to recommend masking, partly because agency scientists didn’t recognize quickly that the virus was airborne. In May of last year, Dr. Walensky announced that vaccinated people could take masks off indoors and outdoors; just weeks later, it became clear that vaccinated people could not only get breakthrough infections but also could transmit the virus.

In August, Dr. Walensky joined President Biden in supporting booster shots for all Americans, before scientists at the Food and Drug Administration or her own agency had reviewed the data on whether they were needed.

More recently, the highly contagious Omicron variant has led the C.D.C. to issue recommendations based on what once would have been considered insufficient evidence, amid growing public concern about how these guidelines affect the economy and education.

In December, the C.D.C. shortened the isolation period for infected Americans to five days, although it appears that many infected people can transmit the virus for longer. Over the past few weeks, some experts have criticized the agency for changing the metrics used to assess risk and determine appropriate local measures, in order to appease business and political interests.

Supporters of Dr. Walensky say that the agency has been handed an extraordinary task, and that the C.D.C. is doing its best under extremely difficult circumstances — not least that most employees have been working remotely.

In a separate statement issued to the public on Monday, Dr. Walensky said that “never in its 75 year history has CDC had to make decisions so quickly, based on often limited, real-time, and evolving science.”

HEADLINE	04/04 South Africa lifts Covid ‘state of disaster’
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/04/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine?action=click&pgtype=Article&module=&state=default&region=footer&context=breakout link back to briefing#south-africa-lifts-its-covid-state-of-disaster-after-two-years
GIST	<p>JOHANNESBURG — South Africa is ending its national “state of disaster” over the coronavirus pandemic, which has been in effect for 750 days and allowed the government to impose some of the broadest public health restrictions seen anywhere.</p> <p>The regulations will fall away at midnight local time on Monday, President Cyril Ramaphosa said in a televised address.</p> <p>“The end of the national state of disaster is a firm statement of our determination to live our lives and rebuild our country, even as this virus remains in our midst,” Mr. Ramaphosa said.</p> <p>South Africa has recorded more coronavirus cases than any other nation in Africa — 3.7 million since the start of the pandemic — and more than 100,000 virus-related deaths. The country, with a more developed economy than most in Africa, has been an outlier in its region, where most countries have recorded relatively low rates of coronavirus infections, hospitalizations and deaths.</p> <p>After four major waves of coronavirus infections, including some of the earliest known cases of the Omicron variant, the authorities in South Africa are hopeful that rising vaccination rates in the country will ease the burden on its health care system. Just over one-third of South Africa’s population is fully vaccinated, according to Our World in Data — a high rate for Africa, though still well below that of many developed nations.</p> <p>In a precursor to Monday’s announcement, Mr. Ramaphosa described a “new era” in South Africa’s response to Covid-19 in a speech last month, when he cited data showing that 60 percent of South Africans had acquired some level of immunity through vaccination, getting over an infection, or both.</p> <p>South Africa’s government announced a state of disaster — akin to what many other countries call a state of emergency — on March 15, 2020, soon after the first known case of Covid was reported in the country. Early on, the restrictions included limits on the types of clothing and shoes — like sandals — that people could buy, a regulation intended to keep them from leaving their homes. The restrictions also included bans on the purchase of alcohol and cigarettes; violators could be arrested and fined.</p> <p>Those restrictions were gradually eased, but limits on large gatherings remained, and masks were required throughout the state of disaster. Those and other remaining restrictions will now be phased out over the next 30 days. Indoor and outdoor venues that require patrons to show proof of vaccination or a negative test no more than 72 hours old will be allowed to admit up to 50 percent of capacity.</p> <p>Travelers entering South Africa will still be required to show proof of vaccination or a recent negative test, and if they test positive while visiting South Africa, they will still be required to isolate for 10 days.</p> <p>New guidelines for visitors and those living in South Africa are expected from the health ministry in May.</p> <p>South African officials will continue to pay out a monthly social relief grant, introduced in 2020 to ease the economic effects of the pandemic. Two million jobs were lost over the last two years, according to government statistics.</p> <p>The lifting of restrictions now will help the economy recover and “get our country back on track,” Mr. Ramaphosa said.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 Colleges relax Covid testing requirements
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/04/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine?action=click&pgtype=Article&module=&state=default&region=footer&context=breakout link back to briefing#college-covid-testing-requirements
GIST	<p>Colleges and universities across the United States have relaxed campus requirements for coronavirus testing of vaccinated people in recent weeks, chipping away at some of the last widespread surveillance testing programs and dismaying public health experts, who say that robust sources of transmission data will be lost.</p> <p>Cornell University, Stanford University, the University of Southern California and Duke University are among the major institutions that have already dropped regular testing requirements for fully vaccinated and boosted community members, or that plan to do so in the next few weeks.</p> <p>Institutions like those provided a “rich environment” to understand transmission in shared living areas, said Saskia Popescu, an infectious disease epidemiologist and adjunct professor at University of Arizona’s College of Public Health.</p> <p>Most universities making the change will continue to require that unvaccinated students and staff members be tested regularly, though that is a relatively small population on campuses with vaccine mandates. Limiting surveillance testing to that group could make it harder to track the spread of the virus and the highly contagious Omicron subvariant BA.2, experts said.</p> <p>Cornell, for instance, has reported that 97 percent of its students are fully vaccinated and 92 percent have also received a booster dose. The university credited its extensive surveillance testing program, which included testing vaccinated students weekly, with uncovering the rapid spread of Omicron among students in December.</p> <p>Two months later, university officials said they were “confident that frequent and regular testing of nonsymptomatic, vaccinated-and-boosted individuals is no longer necessary to adequately monitor our community.” In mid-March the school also eased its on-campus mask mandate.</p> <p>By the end of the month, Cornell experienced a rise in coronavirus cases that appeared to be second in intensity only to its initial Omicron wave in December, which resulted in final exams moving online and the cancellation of all university-sponsored events.</p> <p>Cases are increasing “beyond our predictions,” officials said on March 23.</p> <p>Getting an accurate count of active cases on campus is now more difficult. A majority of positive test results are now being recorded through tests of people who already have symptoms, the university said, meaning that asymptomatic cases — the kind that may only be spotted through surveillance testing — have gone undetected. People who have enough coronavirus in their bodies to test positive but are not feeling any symptoms are still able to spread the virus to others, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>Even so, some public health experts say that advances in wastewater surveillance, widespread access to rapid tests and the protection offered by vaccines and previous infections mean that shifting a university’s strategy to targeted testing could work — barring a drastic shift in the virus, like the possible emergence of more vaccine-evasive variants that scientists have warned about.</p> <p>“It could easily be true that proactive testing was a useful thing for them to have done, and that they don’t need it now,” said Carl Bergstrom, a professor of biology at the University of Washington in Seattle and a paid consultant for Color, a health technology company that has run coronavirus testing for businesses and universities.</p> <p>Universal surveillance testing involves a lot of work and a lot of expense, so colleges are contending with questions of sustainability. Boston University has processed more than two million tests at its own</p>

	<p>laboratory since August 2020 at significant cost, said Dr. Judy Platt, the school’s chief health officer. The university will end asymptomatic testing entirely after May 23.</p> <p>Whatever the reasoning, the reduction in testing, particularly alongside the easing of mask mandates, has left many of the most vulnerable people on campuses feeling betrayed.</p> <p>Rebecca Harrison, a doctoral candidate who was a member of Cornell’s initial reopening committee in 2020 and is immunocompromised, said she found her university’s rhetoric around learning to live with the virus to be a “slap in the face” — particularly its decision to accept some level of “inevitable viral spread” among the vaccinated, as the university’s president said during a January town-hall meeting.</p> <p>Other U.S. institutions have ended widespread surveillance testing. Businesses that are eager to have employees return to offices have relied on at-home tests and self-reporting. The N.F.L. suspended all its Covid-19 protocols, including random screenings, in March. The White House has warned that some virus surveillance would have to wind down without increased funding from Congress, leaving the country less prepared for the next variant.</p> <p>“We’re giving politicians justification for the decisions they’re making,” Ms. Harrison said of elite research universities backing away from surveillance testing. “And that hurts everyone.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 Putin seeks a victory, war moves east
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/04/world/europe/ukraine-war-east-russia.html
GIST	<p>KHARKIV, Ukraine — Soldiers waved off traffic, emerging from trenches dug into the side of a multistory apartment building, telling motorists to turn around. Firefighters arrived soon after, unfurling hoses to combat a growing blaze ignited by an artillery round that hit a nearby housing complex.</p> <p>More than 30 days into Russia’s invasion of Ukraine there is little chance that Russian forces can soon seize Kharkiv, a city of 1.4 million roughly 30 miles from the Russian border. But every day howitzer shells, rockets and guided missiles slam into its neighborhoods. Parts of the city are now unrecognizable. Many people have fled or live underground.</p> <p>This systematic destruction produces little military gain, but is part of a broader strategy to seize the country’s East, analysts and U.S. military officials say.</p> <p>The devastation of Kharkiv is a template for Russia’s shifting strategy as it turns its attention to Ukraine’s Donbas region, a swath of land in the East that is roughly the size of New Hampshire. It encompasses two breakaway enclaves located southeast of Kharkiv, where Russian-backed separatists have been fighting Ukrainian government forces for eight years. A significant amount of Ukrainian forces are still entrenched there.</p> <p>Having failed to score a quick victory or capture Ukraine’s capital, Kyiv, Russia has resorted to shelling large population centers like Kharkiv in the north and Mariupol in the south, to ensure that Ukrainian resources, manpower and civil services are occupied away from the front lines where the Russians are looking to take territory.</p> <p>“They’re trying to tie up Ukrainian forces so they can focus on the northern and southern part” of the country’s east, said Michael Kofman, the director of Russian studies at CNA, a research institute in Arlington, Va.</p> <p>It’s a critical goal for President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia. Gaining control of the Donbas would effectively partition off a piece of Eastern Ukraine, and the Russian leader could sell it to his country as a victory — perhaps by May 9, Russia’s Victory Day, when the country honors its triumph over Germany in World War II.</p>

At the same time, Mr. Putin also has aides engaged in peace talks that could serve as something of a backup option if Russia falls short of a decisive battlefield victory. A peace agreement that includes significant Ukrainian concessions could give Mr. Putin a way to declare that Russia's mission was accomplished, even if its forces failed to topple the government of President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine.

Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest city and once home to a vibrant social scene, is practically a ghost town. At 8 p.m. shades are drawn and a citywide blackout lasts until sunrise. Stars are easily seen in the night sky.

Some neighborhoods are untouched by the shelling, while others are completely decimated. Apartments in the hard-hit areas are burned out, cars flipped over, wires severed and shrapnel litters what seems like every square foot of some thoroughfares, easily popping car tires.

The shelling diverts resources that might otherwise go toward fighting. Soldiers have to dig trenches around the city's perimeter waiting for a ground attack that will likely never come. Police dart around the city, pulling people over and arresting those suspected of being Russian saboteurs. The city's fire department logs an average of 10 to 20 calls a day, often just to deal with the damage from the shelling, and is frequently forced to rely on its own water tankers because of the extensive damage to hydrants.

Russia's initial attempts to completely seize Ukraine failed almost as soon as they began, an outcome that surprised many analysts. The conventional thinking was that Ukraine, with the far smaller and less equipped military, would be outmatched and that the Russians would end up fighting an insurgency instead of a standing military.

The opposite turned out to be true. As Russian forces have retreated around Kyiv, Ukrainian forces have gained ground in the country's northeast and south. The southern city of Mariupol has been encircled and under siege by Russian troops for weeks, but has not been captured. Neither has another southern coastal city, Mykolaiv, also a target of Russian attacks. Dueling artillery battles have become the norm as infantry forces on both sides dig in.

But even though Russia was plagued by low morale, logistical problems and casualties, its units, for the most part, did not surrender en masse or flee.

The Russian failure boiled down to one point, analysts said: doing too much at once.

"Eventually it became clear their initial campaign was a completely unworkable military strategy," Mr. Kofman said. "They were competing along axes of advancement, and they were basically advancing in opposite directions on the way. There was no way they were going to succeed."

Russia's repositioning has created, in some ways, a pause in the war. With its first phase over and the second phase just beginning, both sides are trying to prepare for each other's next move.

"To attempt an assault in the Donbas, the Russians will need access to all the forces they've stuck around Kyiv," Mr. Kofman said, a conclusion that military officials in Washington have also reached.

By shifting forces to the east, Moscow has limited the amount of pressure on its forces; the occupied separatist regions and the heavily mined front lines there provide a natural backstop for any future Russian advances. The separatist forces there have also provided willing backup troops that helped Russia make progress earlier in the war.

But even with modest Russian gains around the Donbas and the reshuffling of forces from Kyiv, it remains unclear if Russia has enough forces to complete its strategy of encircling the Ukrainian forces entrenched in the Donbas, seizing the region and completing a land bridge to occupied Crimea, which it seized in 2014.

The number of Russian losses in the war remains unknown, though Western intelligence agencies put the number at around 10,000 killed and 30,000 wounded. Losses of armored vehicles — key pieces of equipment necessary in any kind of offensive in this type of war — number in the hundreds, according to military research groups.

What remains even murkier is the current state of Ukrainian forces.

Ukraine's government has severely restricted information about its casualty numbers, and front-line access to its forces is practically nonexistent for most news organizations. But what is clear is that Ukrainian units are involved in a protracted fight, and on the receiving end of advanced armaments, air support, heavy artillery and a determined enemy. This leaves the question: How long can they hold?

Around Izyum, a city of roughly 45,000 some 75 miles southeast of Kharkiv, Russian forces suffered less severe losses than did Ukrainian fighters, according to a U.S. military official, enabling Russian troops to solidify their front lines. Despite the city's strategic importance, Ukrainian forces could not withstand the attack.

"The Ukrainian military has lost a substantive amount of equipment and will need a significant amount of ammunition for its artillery units," Mr. Kofman said. "The Ukrainian government has also mobilized a significant amount of their reserves; they just don't have enough equipment for them."

Though Western-supplied weapons, such as the Javelin anti-tank missile, have received a lot of attention, the war in Ukraine has also turned heavily on indirect fire: mortars, howitzers and rockets. So far, the Russian strategy has been to use heavy shelling to help take territory, then build fortifications and defend it until their casualties become unsustainable.

That strategy has worked for the Ukrainians too. This was apparent in Trostyanets, a town in northeastern Ukraine that was retaken from the Russians several days ago. The tide of the battle turned, residents said, when Ukrainian forces successfully shelled and destroyed the Russian artillery position in one of the town's squares.

Analysts say this dynamic will continue to play out in the Donbas, a less populated area compared with western Ukraine, with small towns, road networks that stretch for miles and mostly flat fields.

"The Ukrainian forces have had a lot of success where Russian forces have been really degraded and have had to retreat because of their losses," Mr. Kofman said. "But there are still major battles to come."

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HEADLINE	04/04 ICE directs lawyers clear low-priority cases
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/04/us/politics/ice-immigration-cases.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Biden administration is seeking to clear potentially hundreds of thousands of deportation and asylum cases pending before immigration courts, an unprecedented move that could significantly reduce the current backlog of 1.7 million cases.</p> <p>In a memo dated Sunday, Immigration and Customs Enforcement directed its lawyers to review cases and try to clear those considered low priority under enforcement guidelines that the administration established last year. The American Immigration Lawyers Association estimates that there are at least 700,000 such cases — about 40 percent of the court backlog.</p> <p>The agency would not provide an estimate of how many cases would be cleared under the directive or how long it would take. Previous administrations have moved cases off the court docket but not on such a broad scale. During the eight years of the Obama administration, more than 166,000 immigration cases were administratively closed, according to court data.</p> <p>The court backlog has ballooned to the largest ever, causing yearslong delays for immigrants seeking asylum and other forms of relief. One reason is that the coronavirus pandemic has delayed proceedings. A</p>

significant number of cases were added during the Trump administration, especially after a surge in undocumented migrants crossing the border in 2019. That administration also reopened tens of thousands of cases that had been removed from the court docket.

The effort to reduce the backlog comes as the Biden administration prepares for what could be the largest increase yet of undocumented migrants crossing the border. The surge is expected to coincide with the end of a pandemic-era public health order that has given border officials the authority to quickly expel undocumented migrants.

It is the latest in a series of efforts by the Biden administration to streamline immigration enforcement in the absence of action from Congress.

An ICE official, authorized by the agency to speak publicly without being identified, said lawyers would review each case before the court to see if it met the administration's priorities for enforcement: cases that involve a public safety or national security threat, as well as those involving people who recently crossed the border without documentation.

Currently, there are more than 300,000 "administratively closed cases," according to Justice Department data. Even though inactive cases can be put back onto the court calendar at any time by any administration, they typically remain closed for many years.

During the Trump administration, more than 34,000 cases were put back on the immigration court docket. Jeff Sessions, the attorney general at the time, issued a decision that limited the authority of immigration judges to move cases off the court calendar — a practice, he wrote, that "encumbers the fair and efficient administration of immigration cases."

The Biden administration disagrees.

"Our immigration enforcement efforts are focused on those who pose a threat to public safety, the security of our borders and our national security," Alejandro N. Mayorkas, the homeland security secretary, said in a statement on Monday. "The memo issued today further empowers our enforcement attorneys to focus on these priorities, and it will help clear a longstanding case backlog that has clogged the immigration court system and stood in the way of swiftly removing the greatest threats."

Closing, dismissing and streamlining low-priority cases, the ICE official said, is a fair and efficient way to address what has been an insurmountable backlog.

ICE officials would not say how long each case review was expected to take. The effort comes after a similar but smaller one that began in February to dismiss certain family immigration cases and direct people to apply through U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, a process that takes less time.

Greg Chen, a senior director of government relations at the American Immigration Lawyers Association, applauded the plan as a proactive step but said that "case-by-case analysis is far more laborious than if they did a database sweep" to determine which ones could be removed from the docket.

The directive will go into effect this month. In late May, when the pandemic-driven public health rule that limited immigration is lifted, officials expect a significant increase in border crossings, including many migrants seeking asylum who will be summoned to immigration court.

A new, separate Biden administration asylum policy, which will direct people who cross the border without documentation to have their claims evaluated by asylum officers instead of immigration judges, will not be fully operational for months.

Undocumented migrants are expected to apply for asylum before immigration judges within a year of arriving. Typically, asylum-seekers who are not detained are issued a summons with a court date and wait an average of more than five years before appearing in court.

	<p>But the crowds of people fleeing to escape poverty, violence and humanitarian disasters have been so large that border officials have taken shortcuts when processing some into the United States, releasing them without a court date and instructing them to finish the paperwork later. That means more cases are headed to the immigration court system.</p> <p>The move to clear cases from the docket could draw criticism from conservatives, who might view it as going easy on undocumented immigrants.</p> <p>“Any initiative that involved a large number of case closures would certainly be considered a form of amnesty, because it would involve not prosecuting immigrants for certain immigration violations,” said David J. Bier, a research fellow on immigration issues at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 Alarm: ‘massacre’ by military central Mali
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/04/world/africa/killing-moura-mali.html
GIST	<p>DAKAR, Senegal — French, American and European officials have expressed serious concerns about allegations that hundreds of people were killed last week in a town in the West African nation of Mali by Malian soldiers accompanied by Russian mercenaries on a campaign to fight insurgents.</p> <p>Although the accounts are still unclear, human rights organizations, security analysts and Malian civil society groups said that between 200 and 400 people had been killed in the town, Moura — and that government troops and Russian fighters might have been responsible.</p> <p>Human Rights Watch described it as “the worst atrocity in Mali’s decade-long armed conflict.” Hundreds more were reportedly killed last month by Islamist insurgents, according to the group.</p> <p>Mali’s armed forces have battled Islamist extremists and other violent groups for the past decade in the Sahel region, an arid strip of land just south of the Sahara, where hundreds of civilians have been killed and hundreds of thousands more have been displaced.</p> <p>French forces fought for nine years alongside Malian forces in the West African nation, but France announced earlier this year that it was ending its counterterrorism operation, known as Barkhane, amid souring relations with the Malian military junta that seized power in a coup in May.</p> <p>Western officials say that Malian security forces have since hired Russian mercenaries with the Wagner Group, a private military company, but both Malian and Russian officials deny that. However, French diplomatic and military sources, who could not be identified because of the sensitivity of the situation, say that about 1,000 Russian mercenaries are now posted in Mali.</p> <p>The reports of a massacre came from Moura, a town of about 10,000 people in the country’s central region, where government officials said dozens of insurgents had gathered. On Saturday, Malian officials said in a statement that they had killed 203 “fighters of terrorist armed groups” in Moura. The statement made no mention of civilian or military casualties.</p> <p>But the West Africa director at Human Rights Watch, Corinne Dufka, who spoke to more than 15 residents of the town, said that helicopters attacked Moura on March 27, a Sunday when hundreds of people had gathered for its weekly livestock market.</p> <p>Ms. Dufka said that the Malian forces were supported by foreign soldiers who were identified by several sources as Russians. Malian forces and Russian mercenaries held the village under siege for four days, she said.</p> <p>Soldiers opened fire on people in the market, said Ms. Dufka, and took some of them to an area outside Moura, where they detained them for four days while searching the town.</p>

Several witnesses told Ms. Dufka that both Malian and foreign forces had executed many men. The bodies of some of them were later burned, she added.

Reached by phone, Colonel Souleymane Dembélé, the head of the Malian armed forces' communication unit, said that he had "no reaction" to the allegations.

Ms. Dufka said that at the time of the attack jihadist fighters were present in the village, which is in an area that is a stronghold of an affiliate of Al Qaeda known as the Macina Liberation Front.

But she added, "Executing civilians and suspects in the name of security is as unlawful as it is counterproductive. It is driving recruitment into abusive groups, stoking intercommunal tension, and undermining trust in the state."

France's foreign ministry said in a statement on Monday that it was "gravely concerned" by reports of "massive abuses" in Moura.

The U.S. State Department referred to the event as a "reported massacre." Ned Price, a department spokesman, said on Sunday in a statement, "We are concerned that many reports suggest that the perpetrators were unaccountable forces from the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group."

On Monday, Josep Borrell Fontelles, the European Union's top diplomat, urged the Malian authorities to grant the United Nations Mission in Mali, or MINUSMA, access to the site of the killings. The mission has a base in Mopti, about 30 miles from Moura. But access to Moura is limited, said Myriam Dessables, a mission spokeswoman.

"It is a flooded area with restricted and difficult access and with a proven presence of violent extremist groups," she said.

At least 71 civilians were killed by the Malian armed forces between December 2021 and last month, according to Humans Rights Watch, and in several instances witnesses said they had been accompanied by "white soldiers" speaking an unknown language. Analysts and Western officials have identified those soldiers as belonging to the Wagner group.

Yvan Guichaoua, a senior lecturer on international conflict at the University of Kent who specializes in the Sahel region, said that Malian forces had a long history of abuses, even before the military junta toppled civilian leaders in the two coups in 2020 and 2021. He said that military abuses fell in the second part of last year, but increased this year.

"That uptick coincides with the arrival of Russian forces," Mr. Guichaoua said. "The frequency and the scale of these attacks are unprecedented."

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HEADLINE	04/04 Sri Lanka protesters defy president
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/04/world/asia/sri-lanka-protests-rajabaksa.html
GIST	<p>COLOMBO, Sri Lanka — After weeks of upheaval over Sri Lanka's economic crisis and growing resentment to his rule, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa offered the public a sacrifice, urging almost his entire cabinet, including several family members, to resign en masse while promising reform.</p> <p>On Monday, Sri Lankans responded unequivocally, defying Mr. Rajapaksa's state of emergency to turn out for protest rallies. "Gota, go home!" they chanted, repeating a refrain urging the president to step down and return to the United States, where he holds dual citizenship. They promised to march until he personally left office.</p> <p>Mr. Rajapaksa and his family have been notoriously unhesitant to use threats and violence to silence critics, stretching back to the country's three-decade civil war that ended in 2009. Now, the widespread</p>

defiance of his government's orders to stay home set up a showdown in which the looming question is whether Mr. Rajapaksa will retreat or respond with characteristic force.

Already there are signs of the latter.

On Thursday, the anger directed at the president reached his doorstep, as protests outside his residence in Colombo turned violent.

The police used tear gas and water cannons on the crowds, and arrested dozens of people, including journalists.

Human rights groups including Amnesty International said many of those detained had been tortured in custody.

Soon after the protests, Mr. Rajapaksa's government imposed a state of emergency on the island, giving security forces sweeping powers of arrest and making it illegal for people to leave their homes.

Over the weekend, hundreds of people were arrested in Sri Lanka's western province, which includes the capital, Colombo, for violating the curfew.

Even more demonstrators took to the streets on Sunday; and on Monday, some 2,000 people broke through barricades attempting to reach one of the prime minister's residences, located about 125 miles outside Colombo. They were repelled with tear gas and water cannons.

The scope and energy of the protests across Sri Lanka suggested that Mr. Rajapaksa's cabinet reshuffle has done little to assuage demands that he step down.

At least five rallies took place in Colombo, while demonstrators also rallied in the hillside city of Kandy, about 90 miles east of the capital; in the tourist-friendly beaches of Galle, about 90 miles south; and in Chilaw, about 50 miles north, in a province governed by a former Navy commander close to the Rajapaksas.

In Colombo and Kandy, protesters also clashed with security forces outside several former ministers' official residences.

"We don't know who will come into power next, so our futures are uncertain. But at least we are fighting for it. I'm glad that so many people are voicing their anger," said Rashika Satheeja, 42, who works in advertising in Colombo and was among hundreds demonstrating at the city's Independence Square.

The protesters vow to continue.

"The current situation is a complete repudiation of the Rajapaksas. The people have no other call than to ask them all to go, to leave politics, because they have been greedy, incompetent and they cannot govern," said Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, executive director of the Colombo-based Center for Policy Alternatives.

"It's an uncompromising word from the ground that the Rajapaksas must go," he said.

Once, the Rajapaksas commanded deep support among Sri Lankans, as the family was hailed for ending the country's civil war and creating an economy that became a model for other nations seeking to rebuild.

Now, for the president, the cost of acceding to the public's demands to step down may seem intolerable. In California, where Mr. Rajapaksa lived before returning to run for president in 2019, he faces civil

charges related to atrocities committed when he was defense secretary, during the brutal final phase of Sri Lanka's civil war.

During his two and a half years as president, he has assumed greater powers through a constitutional amendment, and halted criminal investigations of himself and his family. But his immunity from prosecution goes the moment he does, analysts say.

"People are saying, 'Gota, go home,' but he can't go home because there are too many cases against him," said Murtaza Jafferjee, a director of the Advocata Institute, a think tank. "If he's no longer head of state, all the protections go away."

Still, though Sri Lankans have been enduring up to 13 hours of daily power cuts during the hottest time of the year, long lines for fuel and shortages of food staples like milk powder and rice, their resolve is only likely to harden, analysts say.

The problem for the Rajapaksas is that there is no easy fix to the economic woes plaguing the island.

The stock market stopped trading after a sharp drop in the benchmark share price index on Monday. The Sri Lankan rupee depreciated further, having fallen 33 percent against the dollar since the beginning of the year. And the government is out of money to import much-needed goods.

A bad debt habit that began during the decade-long presidency of Mahinda Rajapaksa, Gotabaya's older brother, had been left largely unaddressed by the time two catastrophes gutted Sri Lanka's all-important tourism industry: the Easter terrorist attacks in 2019 that killed more than 250 people, and the coronavirus pandemic.

Gotabaya Rajapaksa's government responded to the blows by cutting taxes and borrowing even more, adding to a debt load that his brother had taken on to finance big infrastructure projects that still are not profitable.

Billions of dollars in debt payments are coming due, and many analysts are predicting a default. In the meantime, the government has too little foreign currency to import essentials like medicine, food and fuel, causing shortages, lengthy power outages and unprecedented suffering across the island nation.

Early on Monday, Mr. Rajapaksa invited opposition party members to join his cabinet, but none took up the offer.

Harsha de Silva, an economist seen as a possible replacement as finance minister and a member of the opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya party, said he would not join the government before an election could be held.

"I won't accept a ministry without a fresh mandate. We need a proper team to do this. We need a new mandate," he said.

Even political allies of Mr. Rajapaksa have rebelled. Several political parties in his governing coalition, which has a two-thirds majority in Parliament, have demanded that he appoint a caretaker government consisting of all 11 parties represented in the Legislature.

Among them, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party announced that it would quit the government as of Tuesday.

"We will be sitting independently in Parliament from tomorrow. We hope to be part of an interim government, but we have to decide how we are going to work according to the demands of the people," Dayasiri Jayasekara, the party's general secretary, said in an interview with The New York Times.

He went on to say that a snap election was not an option given the current state of the economy, because the government could not afford the cost to run one.

	<p>“We must form an interim government and find a solution to economic woes,” he said.</p> <p>After his initial resistance, President Rajapaksa said last month that the government would seek assistance from the International Monetary Fund, but any financial prop would take several months at least to execute, said W.A. Wijewardena, the former deputy governor of Sri Lanka’s central bank.</p> <p>“What should be done right now, whatever government is to be formed after the fall of the present administration, is to come to the people and tell them the truth,” Mr. Wijewardena said. “We are in a great pain now, and that pain has to be borne by all of us, and we have to sacrifice in order to build the economy back.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 Recoil from Russia gas scrambles markets
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/04/business/russia-europe-natural-gas.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=Business
GIST	<p>Just months ago, Germany’s plans to build a terminal for receiving shiploads of liquefied natural gas were in disarray. Would-be developers were not convinced customers would make enough use of a facility that can cost billions of dollars. And concerns about climate change undermined the future of a fossil fuel like natural gas.</p> <p>Perceptions have changed. After Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the Kremlin’s threats to sever fuel supplies, the government in Berlin has decided it needs these massive facilities — as many as four of them — to wean the country off Russian gas and act as a lifeline in case Moscow turns off the taps. The cost to the taxpayer now seems to be a secondary consideration.</p> <p>Most of the gas that Europe buys from Russia to power its electrical utilities is delivered through pipelines, over land or under the sea. Liquefied natural gas provides another way to move gas great distances when pipelines are not an option. Natural gas is chilled to a liquid and loaded on special tankers. It can then be transported to any port with equipment to turn it back into a gas and pump it into the power grid.</p> <p>“We are aiming to build L.N.G. terminals in Germany,” Robert Habeck, the country’s economy minister, recently said before talks with potential gas suppliers. Mr. Habeck is a politician from the environmentalist Greens but is finding, somewhat to his dismay, that Germany needs the fossil fuel.</p> <p>On Saturday, Lithuania said it had stopped buying natural gas from Russia. The cutoff won’t cause much pain to the Russian budget because Lithuania is a tiny country. But because it is a member of the European Union, its decision held symbolic geopolitical importance. Europe’s energy transition took on new urgency Monday in the wake of global horror at images of bodies lying in the streets in areas of Ukraine that Russian troops have withdrawn from. Leaders debated how to punish Russia without putting Europe at risk of losing critical fuel supplies too quickly.</p> <p>Much as it is changing attitudes across Europe, including Germany, the continent’s largest economy, Russia’s invasion into Ukraine is reshaping energy markets globally. For years, Europe has imported enormous volumes of gas from Russia to heat homes and power industry, but now that practice, which depends on billions of dollars’ worth of pipelines, faces severe curtailment.</p> <p>The European Union wants to end what is now deemed an unhealthy entanglement by 2030. Within a year, it wants to slash dependence on Russia, which supplied 40 percent of European gas last year, by two-thirds.</p> <p>How will these huge volumes of Russian gas be replaced? The European Union is betting on liquefied natural gas.</p>

Europe's leaders want to round up 50 billion cubic meters of additional L.N.G. cargoes over the next year, which amounts to about half the Russian gas it wants to ditch. That's not all Europe is doing. Officials could get more gas via pipelines from Norway and Azerbaijan. They also want to reduce gas consumption by ramping up wind and solar power projects, and are calling on citizens to turn down thermostats. But analysts say Europe would struggle to swiftly replace so much gas. That is one reason Germany is preparing for rationing.

These higher volumes of liquefied natural gas, which would most likely need to continue for years, could cost around \$50 billion at current prices, but much less if bought on long-term contracts from the United States, where prices are a fraction of those in Europe and Asia.

Europe's scramble raises the prospect of a global battle over supplies in a market that analysts say has little slack. Asia, not Europe, is usually the prime destination for liquefied natural gas. China, Japan and South Korea were the leading buyers last year.

The additional gas that Europe is targeting would add around 10 percent to global demand, creating a tug of war with other countries for fuel. That prospect could mean that gas prices that have touched record levels in recent months will remain high, prolonging misery for consumers and squeezing industry.

On Friday, for instance, home energy bills for millions of British consumers rose 54 percent, largely because of soaring wholesale gas costs. Futures prices don't offer any sign of relief.

"Over the next three years competition for L.N.G. is going to be extremely fierce," said Massimo Di Odoardo, vice president for gas at Wood Mackenzie, a market research firm. "Europe and Asia are going to be pulling the blanket" to cover their needs, he added.

In theory, high prices should spur investment in more gas fields. But it is far from certain how much new production today's high prices in Europe will encourage.

"Clearly in the short term you can't replace that amount of gas," said James Henderson, chairman of the gas program at the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, a research institution. But, Mr. Henderson added, Europe is also likely to spend money accelerating its shift to cleaner energy, reducing demand for fossil fuels.

That potential damper isn't stopping Germany from building what would be its first liquefied natural gas terminal and a flurry of new and expansion projects elsewhere in Europe. Berlin seems to have settled on a permanent terminal for a port called Brunsbüttel near Hamburg and has options on three floating structures, which are cheaper. One could be ready in a matter of months.

Even before the latest announcements, L.N.G. volumes for Europe were outpacing Russian pipeline gas. Tankers carrying gas were attracted by the high prices in Europe, which were stoked by tensions over Ukraine; they are now about seven times what they were a year ago. Those prices are a boon to the world's major liquefied natural gas exporters: Qatar, Australia and, above all, the United States, whose shipments of the fuel, a product of shale drilling, increased a remarkable 50 percent in 2021 over the year before.

These energy riches bring political clout. Washington has been offering liquefied natural gas to help Europe break its Russian energy links, a longstanding goal of some American politicians.

On March 25, the Biden administration and the European Union agreed that the United States would "strive to ensure" that at least 15 billion cubic meters in additional L.N.G. this year reached Europe, an amount comparable to around 10 percent of the gas Europe imports from Russia.

Analysts say this commitment is achievable, but mainly because of market dynamics rather than government policies. In the first three months of 2022, at least 115 cargoes of chilled gas left the facilities of Cheniere Energy, the largest U.S. supplier of liquefied natural gas, and headed to Europe, more than double the total in the same period in 2021, according to the company.

Mr. Di Odoardo figures that L.N.G. flows from the United States to Europe have already reached two-thirds of the bilateral target for this year, and so reaching it should be “easy.”

Washington has also leaned on other countries, including Japan, to give up some of their cargoes, and this has led to a substantial drop in shipments heading to Asia from the United States, according to analysts. Over time, though, such generosity may be a harder sell, especially if the war in Ukraine continues indefinitely and markets tighten further.

“Under the current conditions, I don’t think that Japan has the room to commit to long-term, continuous L.N.G. shipments,” said Michitaka Hattori, a director at the Japan Institute for Russian & NIS Economic Studies.

The surest way to bring prices down is to add more supply. High prices will encourage marginal increases in exports, but it usually takes more than two years to build facilities for processing gas, such as the terminal that Germany wants to build. Of course, liquefied natural gas demand, which grew 6 percent in 2021, is likely to continue to grow as China and other countries shift to gas from pollution-spewing coal.

“I think the winter market for gas is going to remain very tight because of Asia’s shift from coal to gas,” said Marco Alverà, chief executive of Snam, a large Italian energy company.

Cheniere Energy is moving ahead with a large expansion of its export facility at Corpus Christi, Texas. Qatar also says it is working on adding an enormous slug of liquefied natural gas in the next five years.

Developers, though, will be wary of whether the current boom in Europe might fade well before the expiration of the new L.N.G. projects, which are generally expected to operate for 20 years or more. And European leaders insist they still view gas as a temporary fix before renewable energy sources like wind, solar and hydrogen take over.

“There is a question mark there about how much new gas will be needed,” said Mr. Henderson of the Oxford Institute.

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HEADLINE	04/04 West leaders seek tougher sanctions
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/04/world/europe/biden-putin-ukraine-war.html
GIST	<p>The images of dead Ukrainians, some with their hands tied and others haphazardly buried in pits, spurred shocked Western leaders on Monday to promise even tougher sanctions against Russia, including possibly on energy, as the Kremlin dug in and showed signs of preparing a new assault.</p> <p>The growing evidence that Russian soldiers killed scores of civilians in the Kyiv suburb of Bucha, leaving their bodies behind as they withdrew, prompted President Biden to call for President Vladimir V. Putin to face a “war crime trial.” Germany and France expelled a total of 75 Russian diplomats, and President Emmanuel Macron of France said the European Union should consider sanctions against Russian coal and oil.</p> <p>“This guy is brutal,” Mr. Biden said of Mr. Putin. “And what’s happening in Bucha is outrageous, and everyone’s seen it.”</p> <p>In Moscow on Monday, Mr. Putin said nothing about his war in Ukraine, but his spokesman, Dmitri S. Peskov, said the Kremlin “categorically” denied “any allegations” of Russian involvement in the atrocities. Instead, Russia’s state media aired relentless conspiracy theories about what it said was a Ukrainian fabrication, while the authorities threatened to prosecute anyone who publicly blamed Russians for the Bucha killings.</p>

Russia said the bodies had been placed only recently on the streets after “all Russian units withdrew completely from Bucha” around March 30. But a review of videos and satellite imagery by The New York Times shows that many of the civilians were killed more than three weeks ago, when Russia’s military was in control of the town.

The war in Ukraine may now be headed for an even more dangerous phase, despite Russia’s withdrawal last week from areas near Kyiv.

Ukrainian and Western officials said that Russia appeared to be positioning troops for an intensified assault in the eastern Donbas area, where the port city of Mariupol remains under a brutal siege. And in Kharkiv, roughly 30 miles from the Russian border, unrelenting bombardment has left parts of the city of 1.4 million unrecognizable.

The systematic destruction produces little military gain, but is part of a broader strategy to seize the country’s east, analysts and U.S. military officials say.

With the Russian economy showing some signs of resilience after the initial shock of the wide-ranging Western sanctions put in place after Mr. Putin’s invasion in February, the Kremlin appeared to be girding for a continuation of the war, despite talk in European capitals of now possibly banning Russian coal, oil or, less likely, gas.

“They are not going to stop,” Oleksiy Danilov, the secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, said in a statement on Monday. “Putin’s order given to his soldiers to destroy our state has not disappeared.”

In a visit to Bucha on Monday, President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine left the door open to a negotiated peace, despite the horrific scenes uncovered over the weekend. In a camouflage bulletproof vest, surrounded by soldiers and journalists, Mr. Zelensky accused Russia of “genocide,” but said he was still hoping to meet with Mr. Putin to try to stop the war.

“Ukraine must have peace,” Mr. Zelensky said. “We are in Europe in the 21st century. We will continue efforts diplomatically and militarily.”

Mr. Biden, speaking to reporters in Washington after returning from Delaware, said that “information” needed to be gathered for a trial of Mr. Putin, calling the Russian leader a “war criminal.” Mr. Biden said he would at some point be announcing more sanctions against Russia, without specifying what they would be.

In Europe, the growing evidence of Russian atrocities also appeared to be paving the way for more sanctions, even as divisions remained among E.U. members of whether to impose a broad ban on Russian energy imports.

“Today there are very clear signs of war crimes,” Mr. Macron, the French president, told France Inter radio. “Those who were responsible for those crimes will have to answer for them.”

European Union ambassadors will meet on Wednesday to discuss another package of sanctions against Russia, but the extent of the new measures is still very much in flux, diplomats and officials said. A meeting of NATO defense ministers is also scheduled to take place that day.

Since the start of the conflict, European leaders, along with the United States, have pursued a strategy of putting sanctions in place a piece at a time, gradually toughening them to leave themselves more cards to play in case Russia escalates the conflict.

But the outrage over the new revelations of atrocities may force their hand.

One version of a new E.U. sanctions package under consideration could include a ban on Russian coal, but not oil and gas, E.U. officials said. Bans on Russian goods entering E.U. ports are also under consideration, as well as smaller measures to close loopholes in existing sanctions, European diplomats and officials said.

While Mr. Macron said the new sanctions should target both coal and oil, Christian Lindner, the German finance minister, indicated that coal would be the only Russian energy export included in the sanctions package. The European Union, he said, needed to “differentiate between oil, coal and gas.”

Coal, which is largely mined by private companies in Russia, is less critical to the Kremlin’s coffers than the oil and gas industry, in which state-owned companies play the leading role.

Germany is the key country holding the bloc back from an outright ban on oil and gas, though the idea is also unpopular in other, smaller European nations that largely rely on Russian supplies. Berlin has consistently argued that sanctions against Russia ought to hurt Russia more than they hurt Europe.

Germany’s hesitation to endorse oil and gas sanctions was on display Sunday, when cracks appeared in the coalition government’s position on such a move.

Christine Lambrecht, the defense minister, said the bloc should consider banning gas imports, while the economy and energy minister, Robert Habeck said such a move would not be useful because Mr. Putin has “already practically lost the war.”

“The horrifying news from Bucha will certainly pile more pressure on the E.U. to impose energy sanctions on Moscow this Wednesday, but hard-hitting import bans on oil and gas remain unlikely for now,” said Mujtaba Rahman, managing director for Europe at Eurasia Group, a consultancy.

“Internal momentum is building over stopping Russian coal,” Mr. Rahman said, “If anything, that’s likely to be the first thing Brussels targets on the energy side.”

Mr. Rahman said that, for now, the economic and political costs of a sudden stop of Russian oil and gas imports were too high for most E.U. leaders. He said it could take Russia using chemical, biological or nuclear weapons in Ukraine to lead the E.U. to impose sanctions on oil and gas imports.

Still, the Bucha revelations did prompt Germany and France — two countries that have long been careful to avoid provoking Russia — to escalate the confrontation with Moscow.

Germany said it would expel 40 Russian diplomats, an unusually high number for a single round of expulsions that Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said was necessitated by the “incredible brutality on the part of the Russian leadership and those who follow its propaganda.”

France said it, too, would expel “many” Russian diplomats stationed in the country; a Foreign Ministry official put the number at 35.

And Lithuania expelled the Russian ambassador and recalled its own from Moscow, the first time that a European country has made such a move since the start of the war.

Russia promised to retaliate against the expulsions and dismissed the reports of the atrocities in Bucha, describing them as fabricated pretexts for more sanctions. State television even claimed that Western operatives had chosen Bucha for their “provocation” because the town’s name sounded like the English word “butcher.”

It was the latest instance in which the Kremlin’s media machine has tried to parry overwhelming evidence of Russian involvement in an atrocity with a flood of conspiracy theories sowing confusion among casual consumers of the news.

	<p>It appeared likely that, inside Russia, the approach would work. The Kremlin narrative is increasingly the only one being heard by regular Russians, with independent news media shut down, access to Facebook and Instagram blocked, and a new censorship law punishing any deviation from that narrative with as much as 15 years in prison.</p> <p>Driving the point home, the Russian general prosecutor's office issued a statement on Monday indicating that anyone referring to the Bucha atrocities as Russia's doing risked prosecution.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/05 New Covid variant XE identified
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/covid-19-variant-xe-identified-experts-alarmed/story?id=83862042
GIST	<p>A new COVID-19 variant has been identified in the United Kingdom, but experts say there is no cause for alarm yet.</p> <p>The variant, known as XE, is a combination of the original BA.1 omicron variant and its subvariant BA.2. This type of combination is known as a "recombinant" variant.</p> <p>Public health experts say that recombinant variants are very common and often crop up and disappear on their own.</p> <p>"Right now, there's really no public health concern," said Dr. John Brownstein, an epidemiologist and chief innovation officer at Boston Children's Hospital and an ABC News contributor. "Recombinant variants happen over and over. In fact, the reason that this is the XE variant recombinant is that we've had XA, XB, XC, XD already, and none of those have turned out to be any real concern."</p> <p>According to an update last week from the U.K. Health Security Agency, 637 cases of XE have been identified as of March 22, with the earliest detected Jan. 19.</p> <p>An early indication from the U.K. suggests XE could be slightly more transmissible than BA.2, but the World Health Organization said more research is needed.</p> <p>Meanwhile, XE makes up less than 1% of total COVID-19 cases that have undergone genomic sequencing in the U.K., and there is no evidence to suggest that the variant can escape vaccines, cause more severe disease or is more deadly.</p> <p>"This particular recombinant, XE, has shown a variable growth rate, and we cannot yet confirm whether it has a true growth advantage," Professor Susan Hopkins, chief medical adviser for UKHSA, said in a statement.</p> <p>So far, no cases of the recombinant variant have been reported in any other country, including the United States.</p> <p>Brownstein said there are still a lot of unanswered questions surrounding XE, but that -- in the U.S. -- there is a high level of protection both from vaccines and from natural immunity during the omicron wave.</p> <p>"It's possible it may be more transmissible, but that doesn't necessarily mean it's more severe," he said. "And given the sheer number of infections we've already seen with omicron, it's really unclear whether even being slightly more transmissible means we'll see any impact of this variant whatsoever."</p> <p>Brownstein said one of the reasons the U.K. was able to pick up on the variant as quickly as it did is because of its robust surveillance system.</p> <p>According to the global database GISAID, the U.K. has submitted more than 1 million omicron samples for genomic surveillance. The U.S. has submitted more than 781,000.</p>

"The U.K. has done a phenomenal job of sequencing a large number of cases, doing analyses and producing the output of that work," he said. "So you could see the identification of XE actually as a positive because it shows that our public health systems are working, identifying new variants even when the case numbers are super small."

Brownstein added, "This shows that some of these variants can be needles in a haystack, and here we have an example of one being identified very early on."

The World Health Organization released its own report saying it is monitoring XE, but there is no evidence yet that it is a variant of concern like alpha, delta and omicron.

"WHO will continue to closely monitor and assess the public health risk associated with recombinant variants" and will "provide updates as further evidence becomes available," the organization said in a report published March 29.

Brownstein said variants will continue to emerge, but it is important for people to follow COVID-19 mitigation measures so they don't get a chance to spread.

"Being vaccinated and boosted, as well as practicing good hygiene and following public health recommendations all help to drive transmission down in the community," he said. "When we have uncontrolled spread, that's when the virus is given chances to mutate."

The UKHSA said it is also monitoring two other recombinant variants known as XD and XF, both of which are a combination of the delta variant and BA.1.

To date, only 38 cases of XF have been identified in the U.K. and none since mid-February while the XD variant has only been identified in global databases in 49 cases, mostly in France.

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HEADLINE	04/04 NKorea warns: nuclear response to South
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/north-korea-warns-nuclear-response-south-provokes-83874893
GIST	<p>SEOUL, South Korea -- For the second time this week, the powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un berated South Korea for touting its supposed preemptive strike capabilities against the North, saying her country's nuclear forces would annihilate the South's conventional forces if provoked.</p> <p>In a statement carried Tuesday by North Korea's state media, Kim Yo Jong called South Korea Defense Minister Suh Wook's recent comments about preemptive strikes a "fantastic daydream" and the "hysteria of a lunatic."</p> <p>She stressed that North Korea doesn't want another war on the Korean Peninsula but warned it would retaliate with its nuclear forces if the South opts for preemptive strikes or other attacks, which would leave the South's military "little short of total destruction and ruin."</p> <p>North Korea has repeatedly stated it would preemptively use its nuclear weapons when threatened by rivals as it accelerated its development of nuclear bombs and missiles, which Kim Jong Un sees as his strongest guarantee of survival.</p> <p>In another statement directed toward Suh on Sunday, Kim Yo Jong called him a "scum-like guy" and warning that the South may face a "serious threat" because of his comments.</p> <p>Her statements come amid tensions over North Korea's accelerating weapons tests this year, including its first test of an intercontinental ballistic missile since 2017 on March 24, as her brother revives nuclear brinkmanship aimed at pressuring Washington to accept the North as a nuclear power and remove crippling sanctions.</p>

Some experts say the North may up the ante in the coming months, possibly test-flying missiles over Japan or resuming nuclear explosive tests, as it tries to get a response from the Biden administration, which is distracted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and an intensifying rivalry with China.

The renewed tensions have been a major setback for outgoing South Korean President Moon Jae-in, a dovish liberal who had staked his presidential term on his ambitions for inter-Korean rapprochement.

During a visit to the country's strategic missile command last week, Suh said South Korea has the ability and readiness to launch precision strikes on North Korea if it detects the North intends to fire missiles at South Korea.

Seoul has long maintained such a preemptive attack strategy to cope with North Korea's missile and nuclear threats, but it was highly unusual for a Moon administration official to publicly discuss it.

"In case (South Korea) opts for military confrontation with us, our nuclear combat force will have to inevitably carry out its duty ... a dreadful attack will be launched and the (South Korean) army will have to face a miserable fate little short of total destruction and ruin," Kim said in her latest statement.

South Korea's government didn't immediately respond to her comments. Seoul had issued a low-key response following Kim's earlier comments on Sunday, urging Pyongyang to refrain from further raising tensions and return to dialogue.

Moon met Kim Jong Un three times in 2018 and lobbied hard to help set up his Kim's first summit with then-President Donald Trump in June that year.

But the diplomacy derailed after the second Kim-Trump meeting in 2019 where the Americans rejected North Korea's demands for major sanctions relief in exchange for a limited surrender of its nuclear capabilities.

Kim has since vowed to bolster his nuclear forces and sped up weapons development despite limited resources and pandemic-related difficulties. North Korea has also severed all inter-Korean cooperation while expressing anger over U.S.-South Korea military exercises and Seoul's inability to wrest concessions from Washington on its behalf.

Before its resumption of long-range testing last month, the North had spent the much of the past three years expanding its arsenal of nuclear-capable short-range missiles threatening South Korea.

Experts say those missiles, which could potentially be armed with "tactical" battlefield nuclear weapons, communicate the North's threat to use smaller nuclear arms even during conventional warfare to overcome the stronger conventional forces of South Korea and the U.S. The U.S. stations about 28,500 soldiers in the South to deter North Korean aggression.

Moon's term ends in May, when he will be replaced by conservative Yoon Suk Yeol, who could possibly take a harder line on Pyongyang.

U.S. State Department spokesperson Ned Price said Biden's special envoy for North Korea, Sung Kim, plans to meet his Chinese counterpart in Washington to discuss the North's growing threat. China, Pyongyang's major ally and economic lifeline, has repeatedly called for the easing of U.N. Security Council sanctions against the North, citing the economic toll on civilians.

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HEADLINE	04/04 Biden: Putin 'war criminal'; regime change
SOURCE	https://www.newsweek.com/joe-biden-calling-regime-change-russia-this-time-it-isnt-gaffe-1694867?utm_source=

When President [Joe Biden](#) told the world from Warsaw on March 26 that his Russian counterpart [Vladimir Putin](#) "cannot remain in power," the White House quickly sought to downplay the U.S. leader's remarks, noting that Biden's remarks were not a call for "regime change" in Moscow.

But Biden then told reporters he was "not walking back anything," and that his words were an expression of his "moral outrage" at the atrocities he believed a man he's branded a "war criminal" has been responsible for throughout the ongoing war in Ukraine.

The president doubled down on these accusations on Monday, after images emerged purporting to show massacres committed by withdrawing Russian troops in the Ukrainian cities of Bucha and Trostyanets. Russia has [denied committing atrocities](#).

"You may remember I got criticized for calling Putin a war criminal," Biden told reporters on the White House lawn. "You saw what happened in Bucha...he is a war criminal."

"But we have to gather the information," added, "we have to continue to provide Ukraine with the weapons they need to continue the fight, and we have to get all the detail so this can be an actual...wartime trial."

Asked if Putin himself should have to answer for such allegations, Biden said "he should be held accountable."

And while the Biden administration insists there has not been any fundamental shift in Washington's policy, a concerted effort to gather evidence of alleged Russian wrongdoing in the conflict and hold officials, including Putin himself, accountable, marks the first time in more than three decades of Russia's post-Soviet history and more than two decades of Putin's own rule that the U.S. was openly seeking to impose against the Kremlin costs that could bring into question the legitimacy of its leadership.

The implications of such a historic shift are uncertain, though rife with risks that may challenge relations between two nations that collectively hold around 90% of the world's nuclear weapons.

Putin has also long portrayed undesirable U.S. policies against his country as an effort to erode his power and Russia's own position on the world stage.

Rajan Menon, who serves as director of the grand strategy program at the Defense Priorities think tank, senior research fellow at the Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies at Columbia University and professor emeritus at the City College of New York, told Newsweek that the "outrage" expressed by the Biden administration over recent reports of mass killings of civilians in Bucha and Trostyanets as well as the "human catastrophe" surrounding Russia's siege of Mariupol "are understandable—indeed appropriate."

"Moreover, the anger will grow because more horrific incidents will likely come to light," he added. "That said, there are two consequences to keep in mind as the president of the United States calls for regime change in Russia — even without using that term — and Putin's trial as a war criminal."

Menon said the first such consequence is that "Biden will be hard-pressed to reject calls for additional military steps, such as a no-fly zone, because those calling for them will ask why he's holding back when he himself has recognized and condemned the atrocities, and said that Putin should no longer be in power and should indeed be tried for war crimes."

"Yet deeper U.S. military involvement is not without risks," Menon said. "[It's] important to consider when the other side happens to be the world's other nuclear superpower."

Menon said the second order of fallout is the "tension between stark denunciations of Russia and the United States' ability to facilitate a diplomatic settlement of the war — on terms acceptable to Ukraine, of course — whenever that time comes."

"U.S. involvement may prove important, but Moscow may balk," Menon added. "Can you imagine a Biden-Putin phone call, let alone a face-to-face meeting?"

Officials in Moscow have depicted the precipitous downturn in relations between the two as the fault of Washington.

Following Biden's speech in Poland, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova told reporters last Tuesday that Putin's administration was still interested in conducting diplomacy with the U.S. and that "even during the most controversial times we reaffirmed our desire to build equitable relations with Washington."

"If their choice is what we are seeing and which obviously leads to the destruction of bilateral relations, then they will bear responsibility for this," Zakharova said.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told Reuters shortly after Biden's remarks that Putin's fate was "not for Biden to decide" as "the president of Russia is elected by Russians."

China, the top rival of the U.S. and leading strategic partner of Russia, also took note of Biden's comments.

In a March 28 tweet, the Chinese ambassador to Malta, Yu Dunhai, said it was "reasonable to think" that Biden's call for Putin to leave power was "not just a slip of the tongue." Rather, the envoy said "it reveals the true intentions of the US on Ukraine war, namely killing 3 birds with 1 stone: -a regime change -a much weakened Russia -a more dependent Europe."

The U.S. has a long history of trying to unseat unfavorable world leaders by force, and, even when this fails, Washington has tapped into a broad arsenal of economic and diplomatic measures to maintain pressure against foes.

Putin became one of only eight heads of state to be blacklisted by the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control in February, days after he launched the war against Ukraine following failed negotiations with the U.S. and NATO over their military presence in Eastern Europe and Kyiv's bid to join the alliance.

Of this short list, only four others — President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus, Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un of North Korea, President Bashar al-Assad of Syria and President Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela — were actually first hit with sanctions while leading their respective nations.

U.S. ties with nuclear-armed North Korea have also been complex, especially so after then-President Donald Trump took the unprecedented step of meeting Kim as part of an abortive denuclearization-for-peace process. But the Biden administration has repeatedly made clear it did not view Lukashenko, Assad or Maduro as legitimate leaders and has actively backed those who wished to overthrow them.

All four of the sanctioned leaders are still in power.

Moscow's own massive nuclear weapon stockpile, its internal stability and its status as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council severely limit U.S. options to challenge Putin's rule, even if the State Department has amped up criticism of Putin's imprisonment of opposition leader Alexey Navalny.

Russia's power and influence, even in the face of the U.S. and European Union-led coalition of sanctions against the country, also make it unlikely that Putin or his top officials would actually face criminal accountability in forums such as the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Netherlands.

"Leaving aside the question of whether those responsible for the Russian atrocities in Ukraine should be held accountable — and in the abstract, they should be — the probability of Putin or anyone from his inner circle being tried by the ICC, from whose founding treaty Russia withdrew in 2016, or any other international tribunal, is remote at best," Menon said.

The White House did not immediately respond to Newsweek's request for comment.

But Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, told reporters Monday that the U.S. was consulting with partners and allies on a mechanism to pursue Putin, noting that the ICC was "one venue where war crimes have been tried in the past, but there have been other examples in other conflicts of other mechanisms being set up."

"So, there is work to be done to work out the specifics of that," he added. "And between now and then, every day, what we are focused on is continuing to apply pressure to the Russian economy and provide weapons to the Ukrainian people to be able to defend themselves."

The White House has also deflected such measures against citizens of the U.S. and allied countries, with the Trump administration going so far as to impose sanctions against ICC officials in response to an attempt to probe possible war crimes committed by U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

The Biden administration lifted these sanctions last year, but voiced stark opposition to any effort for the ICC to investigate Israel for potential violations of international law committed against Palestinians in their long-running conflict.

And, unlike the shifting tides of the U.S. political system, Putin is set to stay in power for some time, with a change in law allowing him to run for another series of back-to-back four-year terms in 2024, the same year Biden faces a potentially arduous presidential contest of his own, one Russia state-run media outlets have publicly expressed hope would return Trump to power.

Even in the face of the tightening sanctions his war in Ukraine has brought his country, recent polling from the independent, Moscow-based Levada Center has reported a substantial uptick in domestic support for Putin, bringing his favorability to 83%.

No matter how deep the rift between Washington and Moscow gets, the two sides appear fated to deal with one another for the foreseeable future.

"Will the calls for such trials make U.S. relations with Russia even worse? Menon asked rhetorically. Yes," he said.

"Will they nevertheless continue?" he added. "Yes."

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HEADLINE	04/04 Russia media: atrocities 'shot by Nazis'
SOURCE	https://www.newsweek.com/russian-media-spins-bucha-alleged-atrocities-shot-nazis-1694708
GIST	<p>ARussian state-run media outlet on Monday sought to spin the alleged atrocities in the Ukrainian town of Bucha, claiming the slain civilians were "shot by Nazis."</p> <p>Keeping in line with the Kremlin's rhetoric that Russian President Vladimir Putin wants to "de-Nazify" Ukraine, <i>Komsomolskaya Pravda's</i> military correspondent, Alexander Kots, wrote an editorial about who he believes was behind the alleged massacres in the suburbs of Kyiv.</p> <p>Hundreds of bodies were found lying on streets in the town near the Ukrainian capital Kyiv. Ukrainian authorities said on Sunday they were investigating potential war crimes by Russian forces after they withdrew from the town following intense fighting that began days after Putin launched an invasion on February 24.</p>

The Kremlin on Monday denied any accusations connected to the killing of civilians in Bucha.

"Terrible footage was published by the Ukrainian side," wrote Kots. "The Russian military was indiscriminately accused of torture and extrajudicial executions. The proof—only shots with unfortunate people on the streets, in basements."

Kots said he has "no doubt" that the images and videos show dead bodies, but questioned who shot the civilians, repeating the Kremlin's assertions that all Russian forces had left Bucha on March 30.

Ukrainian troops said they recaptured the town of Bucha on Saturday.

"I was in the suburbs of Kyiv...in fact, the withdrawal of our units began even earlier. It's just that by the 30th, there were not a single soldier from Russia left in Bucha," said Kots.

Kots alleged that Ukrainian forces didn't realize immediately that Russian forces had withdrawn completely, and "continued to launch artillery strikes" in Bucha.

He claimed that far-right political figure Sergei Korotkikh, also known by the nicknames "Malyuta" and "Boatswain," gave the orders to fire at people who weren't wearing blue bandages on their sleeves, which he said identifies them as a "friend" of Ukrainian forces.

Some of the dead bodies shown in videos from Bucha showed individuals with a white bandage of their arm, Kots claimed. He said a white bandage "is an identification mark of Russian forces."

Bucha's mayor, Anatoly Fedoruk, told Agence France-Presse on Saturday that white bandages are worn "to show that they were unarmed."

Fedoruk [said](#) at least 20 men in civilian clothes had been shot in the back of the head by Russian forces, and that the town has buried almost 300 people in [mass graves](#).

"Neo-Nazi Sergei Korotkikh 'Boatswain' is also known in Russia by the nickname 'Malyuta,'" wrote Kots. "It was he who gave 'good' to fire at people without identification marks. They just killed people on the streets without understanding whether they had weapons or not."

According to the SOVA Center for Information and Analysis, Korotkikh is a former officer of the Azov regiment, a far-right militia group that rose to prominence in 2014 after the annexation of Crimea, and is now part of Ukraine's National Guard.

Putin made reference to the presence of such regiments within Ukraine's military to justify launching what he calls a "special military operation" against Ukraine that aims to "de-militarize and de-Nazify" the country.

"In Russia, such neo-fascists do not take root, but Ukraine meets them with open arms," said Kots.

Russian pundit Timofei Sergeitsev said in an op-ed published by Russian state news agency RIA Novosti on Sunday that "a significant part of the masses of the people, who are passive Nazis, are accomplices to Nazism. They have supported the Nazi authorities and indulged them..."

Ruslan Leviev, an analyst with the Conflict Intelligence Team, which tracks the Russian military in Ukraine, told [CBS](#) News that "there are no Nazi battalions in Ukraine."

"There is [the Azov] regiment... There are [estimated] several thousand people who are in this regiment. It is indeed a group where many members adhere to nationalist and far-right views," Leviev explained. "But a lot of people also join it because it is one of the most prepared and fit-for-war units."

	<i>Newsweek</i> has contacted Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine for comment.
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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	04/04 Russia largest state-owned media hacked
SOURCE	https://www.dailydot.com/debug/hackers-vgtrk-920k-emails-anonymous-russia/
GIST	<p>Hackers obtained more than 900,000 emails from the All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (VGTRK), the largest state-owned media corporation in the nation.</p> <p>The emails, which appear to encompass over 20 years worth of communications, were provided to the journalism collective Distributed Denial of Secrets (DDoSecrets) by the hacking group known as Network Battalion 65' (NB65).</p> <p>Founded in 1990, VGTRK, also referred to as Russian Television and Radio (RTR), currently oversees five national TV channels, five radio stations, two international networks, and more than 80 regional TV and radio networks.</p> <p>Prominent media groups under VGTRK include Rossiya Segodnya, which operates the news agency Sputnik. VGTRK also boasts that the audience for its popular "Rossiya 1" TV program comprises 98.5% of Russia's population, while its international version reaches viewers across the U.S., Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and China.</p> <p>DDoSecrets has made the 786.2 GB email cache available to the public as a torrent file. NB65 cited the war in Ukraine as the primary motivating factor behind the breach, telling the Daily Dot that it will continue damaging "companies connected to the government" until Russia stands down.</p> <p>"The longer Russian aggression lasts the longer we will continue to attack companies and internet-facing technology throughout the country," the group said.</p> <p>Analysis by the Daily Dot indicates that the hacked data, which come from around 250 inboxes, date as far back as the year 2000 and as recent as March of this year. Emails discuss everything from daily operations to issues related to international sanctions against Russia.</p> <p>VGTRK has been repeatedly accused of being nothing more than a propaganda arm for the Kremlin. The Russian government has even declared VGTRK as essential for the "security of the state."</p> <p>The breach is just the latest in an ever-growing wave of hacktivism targeted at Russia over its attack on Ukraine. As a result, DDoSecrets has been handed a significant number of data dumps from an assortment of Russian entities.</p> <p>Just last week the journalism collective published 5,500 emails from Thozis Corp., a Russian investment firm owned by billionaire Zakhar Smushkin, that it obtained from hackers operating under the banner of Anonymous. An additional 140,000 emails from MashOil, a company which manufactures equipment for the drilling, mining, and fracking industries, were also given to DDoSecrets by Anonymous.</p> <p>Other leaks given to DDoSecrets in March alone include 2.4 GB of emails from the Russian construction company RostProekt, 22.5 GB of files from the Central Bank of Russia, 15.3 GB of files from the Rosatom State Nuclear Energy Corporation, 79 gigabytes of emails from the R&D department of Russia's state-controlled pipeline company Transneft, and 817.5 GB of files from Roskomnadzor, the Russian agency tasked with monitoring, controlling, and censoring Russian media.</p>

DDoSecrets co-founder Emma Best told the Daily Dot that the surge in hacktivism in response to the invasion of Ukraine is providing an unprecedented look inside Russia.

“Frankly, we’ve never seen this much data out of Russia before,” Best said. “The post-invasion Russian leaks easily outweigh all the pre-invasion Russian leaks.”

The cyberattacks have become so constant that Russia’s foreign ministry [pledged](#) last week that it would uncover and apply “grave consequences” to anyone engaged in “cyber aggression.”

Yet given the sheer size of the VGTRK hack, as well as other recent leaks, it will likely take researchers years to comb through it all. The Daily Dot reached out to VGTRK to inquire about the breach of its systems but did not receive a reply.

Anton Shirikov, a Ph.D. candidate in political science at the University of Wisconsin at Madison who has spent years studying Russian media, argues that the current hacktivism wave could give scholars of propaganda a greater insight into the inner-workings of state-run media.

“Overall, if we think about these hacks, there is potential to uncover something that would be of importance to Western intelligence or to people in the government who work on sanctions,” Shirikov told the Daily Dot. “Maybe Ukrainians could also use some of that in their information warfare. I don’t think there is much potential to influence what’s going on in Russia directly through such hacks because Russian media are very censored right now, and there’s little chance that something like that goes through.”

The international hacktivism campaign aimed against Russia is unlikely to slow anytime soon. NB65 as well as numerous other hacking groups have suggested that much more data is on the way.

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HEADLINE	04/04 Kyiv adapted city’s tech to save lives
SOURCE	https://time.com/6163708/kyiv-digital-technology-app/
GIST	<p>When Oleg Polovynko thinks of the first days of the Russian invasion of his country, he looks down at his fitness watch. In normal times, the 38-year-old IT director in Kyiv’s city council used his Garmin watch to track his workouts. “Right now, my heart rate is 62,” he tells TIME, holding up his wrist. “In the first five days after Feb. 24, it was never below 90.”</p> <p>For the past five weeks, Polovynko and his boss, Kyiv’s deputy mayor and chief digital transformation officer Petro Olenych, have led an exhaustive effort to adapt and repurpose everyday technology for a city that has found itself facing a 20th-century-style war. Their creative maneuvers are a key reason that most residents of the Ukrainian capital can connect to the Internet in underground bomb shelters, find open pharmacies and grocery stores, and go to sleep knowing their phone will alert them of incoming air raids before the physical sirens sound.</p> <p>While President Volodymyr Zelensky and Ukrainian digital officials have been lauded for their success in galvanizing global support on social media and fending off the Kremlin’s disinformation campaigns, local officials like Olenych and Polovynko have focused on the practical.</p> <p>“Every day, we wake up and we’re thinking how we can keep people in the city alive and safe,” says Olenych. The popular Kyiv Digital smartphone app, which residents previously used to pay utility bills and parking tickets, now gives them a map of the closest bomb shelters and places to get critical supplies like insulin, food or gasoline. Notifications for the closure of a local metro stop for repairs have given way to warnings of incoming air raids.</p> <p>Even the app’s logo reflects this shift. What was once a friendly sky-blue “K” for Kyiv has been redesigned into a black-and-gray military camo pattern. Speaking to TIME on a video call from an undisclosed location in the city, Olenych and Polovynko wore patches of the new logo taped to their olive green T-shirts.</p>

It's hard to grasp that just two months ago, the main problem their city council faced was complaints about traffic jams downtown. Municipal IT employees now carry guns, and only leave their offices to shower and catch a few hours of sleep whenever they can. (Olenych says he's been sleeping at Polovynko's house since a bomb landed near his own home.) On the day they spoke to TIME, employees of the city council's digital office were poring over mobile data to determine how to best ration food for those that remain.

"I felt like I was part of a modern world, where all of these [technologies] were part of our everyday life, and now suddenly we need to use them for such basic purposes, for life or death," says Polovynko. "I never imagined that I would develop software in 2022 to help people stay alive, to survive things like a missile attack. But of course, we can. And now we're using all of our IT minds in Ukraine to help our people and our soldiers."

On Feb. 24, as the invasion began and air raid sirens blared over the city for the first time since World War II, employees of Kyiv's digital transformation office held a meeting to decide what to do. They quickly agreed that they would not evacuate. A few employees who are mothers of young children left to work from western Ukraine, but the rest would stay in the city.

Over the next few days, Polovynko's team spent much of its time trying to restore their systems from backups after a wave of cyberattacks knocked out their online services. "After that, we became like a big startup, where you always receive a lot of tasks and you only go to sleep when you are finished," Polovynko said about his IT team of roughly 20 employees. "Then you wake up and go back to work."

The next step was to add functionality to the city's smartphone app so that it could warn residents about incoming missile attacks. The Kyiv Digital app, which had launched its most recent version in Jan. 2021, had more than a million users who subscribed to emergency notifications of everything from transit closures to COVID-19 cases. Now they set out to turn this feature into a potentially life-saving early-warning system.

In recent days, there have been 6 to 10 air raid alarms shared by the app per day, according to city officials. A red alarm icon shows the time and the message "Air Warning! Head to the nearest shelter!" It's followed by a green icon telling residents when the danger had passed, according to screenshots shared with TIME.

For Vira Gryaznova, a 49-year old non-profit worker who lives in Kyiv with her husband and two cats, the app has been a lifeline. Gryaznova doesn't have a television and finds it hard to hear the physical sirens from her home. "I was not a user of the Kyiv Digital app before the war," she says. "But I use it now to get information about air raid alerts."

The chaotic first week of the invasion produced long lines for basic goods, as thousands of residents desperately tried to stock up or flee the city. So Kyiv's digital office quickly set up online forms that allowed business owners to report if they were able to open. This information was then added to a map on the app showing which grocery stores, pharmacies and gas stations still have supplies. "Our team has readjusted to deliver new valuable services on an everyday basis," says Victoria Itskovich, who serves as the city's deputy IT director. "The main thing I've learned during this time is that there is no point in striving for the perfect solution. The best product is the one you can launch here and now."

With residents often sheltering underground and Internet providers frequently being knocked offline, connectivity became one of the most pressing problems. "We realized we would have to spend a lot of time in these bomb shelters and there was nothing prepared for the long term," Polovynko says.

Olenych, the deputy mayor, reached out to Kyiv's Internet providers and organized them into a group on a messaging app. Then his office added a feature to the city's app that allowed residents to request Internet access for their bomb shelters. More than 1,000 bomb shelters throughout the city did so. As of Thursday, city officials estimated that roughly 800 had been provided with a WiFi connection.

City officials took mobile WiFi hotspots from empty offices in Kyiv's government buildings to use in bomb shelters. They also got a boost from SpaceX founder Elon Musk, who donated Starlink satellite terminals to provide Internet access after a request from Ukraine's national digital office. In a March 4 photo shared with TIME, Olenych and Polovynko posed with one of Musk's satellite dishes, flashing a thumbs-up sign.

Other Western companies have come to their aid as well. Cloudflare, a San Francisco-based cybersecurity firm, offered the Kyiv city council its services for free, helping them to recover and protect from ongoing cyberattacks. "Cloudflare is appalled by the Russian invasion of Ukraine," spokesperson Laurel Toney told TIME. "Since the run up to the invasion, Cloudflare has worked to protect Ukrainian websites and networks [and] helped Ukrainian government websites come back online while under active cyberattack."

Kyiv's digital office has also been working with Ukrainian mobile operators to arrange free roaming coverage for residents, no matter which provider they use. In recent days, they have also worked with providers on grimmer matters, using analytics of mobile users in Kyiv to get an approximate number of how many people are in the city in order to conserve food rations.

"We really were like Alice in Wonderland—we lived in another world, which was peaceful, friendly, and open," Polovynko says of his work in Kyiv's digital office before the war. "Now we're in a new IT age, where we need to put all of our technology minds towards military goals."

The city's digital office has divided residents into two groups: those who are staying to fight, and those who are staying because they are old, sick, or have no way to escape. Both are relying on their digital services to keep them safe—and prepared for what may come next.

"Our main focus is to use any options that can help us save lives, to use the technology to first of all to protect our people – and to kill another people," says Polovynko. "It's sad, but unfortunately this is the situation we're now in. We cannot lose. Ukrainians will never, never give up, and you feel it when you're here in Kyiv, we will really fight to the end."

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HEADLINE	04/04 Cyber-ops not significant role Russia war?
SOURCE	https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20220404-cyberattacks-have-yet-to-play-a-significant-role-in-russia-s-battlefield-operations-in-ukraine-cyberwarfare-experts-e
GIST	<p>Throughout the latter half of 2021, as it became clear that Russia was massing a large portion of its conventional combat power on the eastern borders of Ukraine, analysts offered contrasting predictions about the role cyberspace would play in an armed conflict. These predictions capture an ongoing debate about whether conflict in cyberspace is destined to supplant conventional conflict or exacerbate it.</p> <p>As the war has evolved, it's clear that analysts on both sides of the debate got it wrong. Cyber operations did not replace the military invasion, and as far as we can tell, the Russian government has not yet used cyber operations as an integral part of its military campaign.</p> <p>We are political scientists who study the role of cybersecurity and information in international conflict. Our research shows that the reason pundits on both sides of the argument got it wrong is because they failed to consider that cyber and military operations serve different political objectives.</p> <p>Cyber operations are most effective in pursuing informational goals, such as gathering intelligence, stealing technology or winning public opinion or diplomatic debates. In contrast, nations use military operations to occupy territory, capture resources, diminish an opponent's military capability and terrorize a population.</p> <p>A Tactical Role for Cyberattacks?</p> <p>It's common in modern warfare for new technologies to substitute for traditional military tactics. For example, the U.S. has made extensive use of drones, including in conflicts in Yemen and Pakistan where</p>

crewed aircraft and ground forces would be difficult or impossible to use. Because drones allow the U.S. to fight on the cheap with much less risk, they substitute for other forms of warfare.

In theory, cyber operations could have played a similar tactical role in Russia's invasion of Ukraine. But the Russian government has [yet to use cyber operations](#) in a manner that is clearly coordinated with military units and designed to smooth the advance of ground or air forces. When Russia invaded Ukraine, hackers [disrupted access to satellite communications](#) for thousands of people, and it was apparently a [concern for Ukrainian defense officials](#). But overall, Ukraine has managed to [maintain internet access](#) and [cellphone service](#) for most of the country.

Russia has [sophisticated](#) cyber capabilities, and its hackers have [worked their way into Ukrainian networks](#) for many years. This raises the question of why Russia has not, for the most part, [used cyber operations to provide tactical support](#) for its military campaigns in Ukraine, at least until this point.

Separate Roles

In recent studies, we examined whether cyber operations mostly serve as complements to, or substitutes for, conventional conflict. In [one analysis](#), we examined conventional [military campaigns around the world](#) over a 10-year period using the [Militarized Interstate Disputes](#) dataset of all armed conflicts. We also focused on [the conflicts in Syria and eastern Ukraine](#). Our results suggest that cyber operations are generally not being used as either.

Instead, nations tend to use these two types of operations independently from each other because each mode of conflict serves different objectives, and cyberwarfare is most effective for gathering intelligence, stealing technology or winning public opinion or diplomatic debates.

In contrast, nations use traditional forms of conflict to control tangible assets, such as capturing resources or occupying territory. The various goals offered by Russian President Vladimir Putin for invading Ukraine, such as [preventing Ukraine from joining NATO](#), [replacing the government](#) or [countering fictitious Ukrainian weapons of mass destruction](#), require occupying territory.

There may be other reasons for the lack of overlap between cyber and conventional fronts in Ukraine. The Russian military could consider cyber operations ineffective for its purposes. The newness of cyber operations as a tool of war makes it [difficult to coordinate](#) with conventional military operations. Also, military targets might not be accessible to hackers because they might lack internet connectivity.

In any event, [evidence](#) that the Russian government intends to use cyber operations to [complement](#) military operations is [thin](#). Our findings suggest hacking groups in previous conflicts faced considerable difficulties in responding to battlefield events, much less shaping them.

How Russia Is Using Cyber Operations

The main target of Russia's digital campaign in Ukraine is ordinary Ukrainians. To date, Russian cyber operations have sought to [sow panic and fear, destabilizing the country from within](#), by [demonstrating the country's inability to defend its infrastructure](#), for example, by defacing or disabling websites.

In addition, Russia has been using information campaigns to attempt to win the "hearts and minds" of Ukrainians. Prior to the start of the conflict, White House press secretary Jen Psaki warned of a [2,000% increase from the daily average in November](#) in [Russian-language social media content](#). This suggests that the purpose of these information operations was to make the case for Russia's intervention on [humanitarian grounds](#) and to build support for intervention among the Ukrainian public. The Russian government's [domestic actions](#) emphasize the value its leadership places on information operations.

A Supporting Role

Hackers' actions tend to occur out of the public eye, rather than in the flamboyantly violent manner favored by Hollywood cyber villains, which means it's difficult to know for sure what's happening.

Nevertheless, the lack of overlap between cyber and conventional military operations makes sense operationally and strategically. This is not to say that the informational focus of cyber operations has no effect on military operations. Good intelligence is [essential for success](#) in any military conflict.

We believe Russia is likely to continue conducting information campaigns to influence Ukrainians, its domestic public and international audiences. Russia is also likely to seek to further penetrate Ukrainian networks to access information that potentially assists its military operations. But because cyber operations have not been thoroughly integrated into its military campaigns so far, cyber operations are likely to continue playing a secondary role in the conflict.

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HEADLINE	04/05 CISA: active exploitation Spring4Shell flaw
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/04/cisa-warns-of-active-exploitation-of.html
GIST	<p>The U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) on Monday added the recently disclosed remote code execution (RCE) vulnerability affecting the Spring Framework, to its Known Exploited Vulnerabilities Catalog based on "evidence of active exploitation."</p> <p>The critical severity flaw, assigned the identifier CVE-2022-22965 (CVSS score: 9.8) and dubbed "Spring4Shell", impacts Spring model-view-controller (MVC) and Spring WebFlux applications running on Java Development Kit 9 and later.</p> <p>"Exploitation requires an endpoint with DataBinder enabled (e.g., a POST request that decodes data from the request body automatically) and depends heavily on the servlet container for the application," Praetorian researchers Anthony Weems and Dallas Kaman noted last week.</p> <p>Although exact details of in-the-wild abuse remain unclear, information security company SecurityScorecard said "active scanning for this vulnerability has been observed coming from the usual suspects like Russian and Chinese IP space."</p> <p>Similar scanning activities have been spotted by Akamai and Palo Alto Networks' Unit42, with the attempts leading to the deployment of a web shell for backdoor access and to execute arbitrary commands on the server with the goal of delivering other malware or spreading within the target network.</p> <p>According to statistics released by Sonatype, potentially vulnerable versions of the Spring Framework account for 81% of the total downloads from Maven Central repository since the issue came to light on March 31.</p> <p>Cisco, which is actively investigating its line-up to determine which of them may be impacted by the vulnerability, confirmed that three of its products are affected -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cisco Crosswork Optimization Engine• Cisco Crosswork Zero Touch Provisioning (ZTP), and• Cisco Edge Intelligence <p>VMware, for its part, also has deemed three of its products as vulnerable, offering patches and workarounds where applicable -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• VMware Tanzu Application Service for VMs• VMware Tanzu Operations Manager, and• VMware Tanzu Kubernetes Grid Integrated Edition (TKGI) <p>"A malicious actor with network access to an impacted VMware product may exploit this issue to gain full control of the target system," VMware said in the advisory.</p> <p>Also added by CISA to the catalog are two zero-day flaws patched by Apple last week (CVE-2022-22674 and CVE-2022-22675) and a critical shortcoming in D-Link routers (CVE-2021-45382) that has been actively weaponized by the Beastmode Mirai-based DDoS campaign.</p>

	Pursuant to the Binding Operational Directive (BOD) issued by CISA in November 2021, Federal Civilian Executive Branch (FCEB) agencies are required to remediate the identified vulnerabilities by April 25, 2022.
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HEADLINE	04/05 Espionage attacks to Chinese hackers
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/04/researchers-trace-widespread-espionage.html
GIST	<p>A Chinese state-backed advanced persistent threat (APT) group known for singling out Japanese entities has been attributed to a new long-running espionage campaign targeting new geographies, suggesting a "widening" of the threat actor's targeting.</p> <p>The widespread intrusions, which are believed to have commenced at the earliest in mid-2021 and continued as recently as February 2022, have been tied to a group tracked as Cicada, which is also known as APT10, Stone Panda, Potassium, Bronze Riverside, or MenuPass Team.</p> <p>"Victims in this Cicada (aka APT10) campaign include government, legal, religious, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in multiple countries around the world, including in Europe, Asia, and North America," researchers from the Symantec Threat Hunter Team, part of Broadcom Software, said in a report shared with The Hacker News.</p> <p>"There is a strong focus on victims in the government and NGO sectors, with some of these organizations working in the areas of religion and education," Brigid O. Gorman, senior information developer at the Symantec Threat Hunter Team, told The Hacker News.</p> <p>Most of the targeted organizations are located in the U.S., Canada, Hong Kong, Turkey, Israel, India, Montenegro, and Italy, alongside one victim in Japan, with the adversary spending as long as nine months on the networks of some of these victims.</p> <p>"There are also some victims in the telecoms, legal and pharmaceutical sectors, but governmental and non-profit organizations appeared to have been the main focus in this campaign," Gorman added.</p> <p>In March 2021, Kaspersky researchers took the wraps off an intelligence-gathering operation undertaken by the group to deploy information-gathering implants from a number of industry sectors located in Japan.</p> <p>Then earlier this February, Stone Panda was implicated in an organized supply chain attack aimed at Taiwan's financial sector with the goal of stealing sensitive information from compromised systems.</p> <p>The new set of attacks observed by Symantec commences with the actors gaining initial access by means of a known, unpatched vulnerability in Microsoft Exchange Servers, using it to deploy their backdoor of choice, SodaMaster.</p> <p>"However, we did not observe the attackers exploiting a specific vulnerability, so we cannot say if they leveraged ProxyShell or ProxyLogon [flaws]," Gorman said.</p> <p>SodaMaster is a Windows-based remote access trojan that's equipped with features to facilitate the retrieval of additional payloads and exfiltrate the information back to its command-and-control (C2) server.</p> <p>Other tools deployed during the infiltrations include the Mimikatz credential dumping utility, NBTScan to conduct internal reconnaissance, WMIExec for remote command execution, and VLC Media Player to launch a custom loader on the infected host.</p> <p>"This campaign with victims in such a large number of sectors appears to show the group is now interested in a wider variety of targets," Gorman said.</p>

	"The sorts of organizations targeted — nonprofits and government organizations, including those involved in religious and education activity — are most likely to be of interest to the group for espionage purposes. The sort of activity we see on victim machines and past Cicada activity also all point to the motivation behind this campaign being espionage."
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HEADLINE	04/04 State Dept. new cyber bureau
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/emerging-technology/state-department-kicks-off-new-cyber-bureau
GIST	<p>For the first time in years, the State Department has a dedicated bureau focused on cyberspace.</p> <p>The department announced the kickoff of the Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy Monday, with Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Jennifer Bachus leading the unit's senior bureau official until an ambassador-at-large can be confirmed by the Senate. Bachus will be joined by Michelle Markoff as acting deputy assistant secretary for international cyberspace security, and Stephen Anderson as acting deputy assistant secretary for international information and communications policy.</p> <p>The bureau will "address the national security challenges, economic opportunities, and implications for U.S. values associated with cyberspace, digital technologies, and digital policy," according to a State Department release. Last year, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the bureau will focus on three key mission areas: international cybersecurity policy, deterrence and cyber operations; international digital policy around promoting "trusted" telecommunications systems and engaging in multilateral discussions and negotiations around human rights online; and engaging with private industry and civil society on technology and cybersecurity issues.</p> <p>Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman has said that the bureau is necessary for the U.S. to influence a wide range of international issues involving cyberspace, from the formation of global cyber norms between state actors and coordinating cyber operations to shaping regulations on the international spyware market and marshaling global support for attribution of cyberattacks. It's also about building in a permanent hub of cyber knowledge and policymaking at the department.</p> <p>"All of these things are very complicated and I'm not smart enough to understand all the technologies and how to manage them, but we're going to grow the expertise here at the State Department and the capacity to be at the table around all of these international negotiations, which are going to grow and grow over the years, to confront the use of technology for surveillance and for control over people by putting together the capability to do so and be the first among equals to do so," Sherman said in October.</p> <p>The need for a dedicated bureau for cyber diplomacy is something lawmakers in Congress have been pressing for years, ever since then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson eliminated the department's cybersecurity coordinator position and transferred most of the position's responsibilities to the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs.</p> <p>Originally, the Trump administration balked at calls for such a bureau, but when legislation to restore the office passed the House in 2018, the administration moved to propose and create its own Bureau of Cyberspace Security and Emerging Technology. That plan was panned by former State officials like Chris Painter, who argued that the administration was rushing the bureau's creation after years of inaction while not giving it the authority and reporting structure necessary to break through international policy silos.</p> <p>At the time, State Department spokesman Ned Price described the differences between the two offices in terms of scope and focus.</p> <p>"So what the previous administration [proposed] was to create a bureau that would be responsible for the national security aspects of cyberspace security and security-related aspects of emerging technology," Price said. "The Cyberspace Security and Emerging Technology Bureau would have been placed under the under secretary for arms control and international security. So this is a very different structure. This is a</p>

	bureau that is focused on the issues that are most critical to cyber, to emerging technologies, but also with the cyber envoy attached separately.”
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HEADLINE	04/05 Ransomware attacks increase
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/ransomware/despite-hopes-for-decline-ransomware-attacks-increased-during-russia-ukraine-conflict
GIST	<p>There are a bevy of reasons that ransomware attacks should have declined during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Squabbles between Ukrainian affiliates and Russian Ransomware designers. Destruction of Ukrainian infrastructure. Enlistments. Fear of boiling the emerging cold war.</p> <p>But measured by postings to leak sites, ransomware did not decline year-over-year during the war — in fact, it flourished. New data from GuidePoint Security show similar peaks and valleys day-by-day from 2021 to 2022, with 2022 seeing considerably more action overall.</p> <p>"What we have concluded from the data is that there really hasn't been a slowdown and the amount of ransomware activity from a public leak site posting perspective during the time leading up to, or even after, the conflict started," said Drew Schmitt, ransomware negotiator and principal threat intelligence analyst with GuidePoint.</p> <p>No ransomware group had more reason to see a decline during the conflict than Conti, who inflamed its affiliates by issuing a threat to the infrastructure of any country that harmed Russia. A member or members of Conti's affiliate chat group leaked internal chats and source code in retaliation, leading the group to dismantle and reconstruct internal systems.</p> <p>Yet, as researchers have already noted, Conti is flourishing.</p> <p>Between Jan. 11 and Feb. 23, the eve of the invasion, Conti averaged fewer than one victim post per day, based on GuidePoint's research. It jumped to 1.5 a day from Feb. 24 to March 3, more than 2.5 a day for the week following that.</p> <p>"One of the hypotheses that we had tackled during this most recent research that a leak of data would have a pretty significant impact on a ransomware group's ability to conduct operations, similar to how any kind of organization that had sensitive data leaked would have an issue," said Schmitt. "What we're seeing as far as the the Q1, 2022, data is that Conti has not had short-term or semi- short term impacts from the leaked data."</p> <p>Ransomware and all cybercrime with a Russian nexus generally declines between the end of one year and the first week of January, while local criminals celebrate New Year and Orthodox Christmas (Jan. 7), the date observed in Russia. Emsisoft tracked only around half the ransomware submissions to its ransomware identification service in December as it did during last year's peak in July.</p> <p>That lull may have given the illusion that ransomware is on the decline, when, year over year, this year's Q1 slump may still be outpacing last year's Q1 slump.</p> <p>For incident responders, even a seasonal decline is a welcome chance to catch their breath.</p> <p>At the law firm BakerHostetler, which had to start scheduling attorneys to be on call to field ransomware inquiries on a dedicated hotline they set up, the beginning of the year marked the first extended period where no one had to abandon their weekend couch.</p> <p>"We normally get at least two calls every weekend at least," said Ted Kobus, who heads the Digital Assets and Data Management practice at the firm. "And we went through a period of, I think, four weeks where no one called the hotline over the weekend. That is a big indication that ransomware had decreased."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 Spain energy giant hit by data breach
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/scottish-power-parent-data-breach/
GIST	<p>Spanish energy giant Iberdrola has been hit by a cyber-attack that led to a data breach impacting over one million customers, according to local reports.</p> <p>The Bilbao-headquartered parent company of UK provider Scottish Power and others said the attack occurred on March 15 this year.</p> <p>It reportedly resulted in the theft of customer ID numbers, home and email addresses and phone numbers, but not financial information such as bank account details or credit card numbers.</p> <p>However, that's still enough information for scammers to craft convincing follow-on attacks to elicit more data, including bank details. Iberdrola reportedly warned customers to be on the lookout for potential phishing attempts seeking financial information and passwords.</p> <p>The energy provider claimed the attack was remediated within a day, and further attempts did not succeed. It's also said that the raid came on the same day the Cercanías commuter rail network in Madrid, the Spanish parliament and several regional institutions came under attack.</p> <p>There are suspicions that some of these may be tied to Russia's conflict in Ukraine after it was revealed that computers in Siberia were involved in the attack on parliament. However, there's no firm evidence to suggest Russian state involvement.</p> <p>According to separate reports, Spain's National Cryptologic Center (CCN) has warned that the Kremlin has been behind almost daily disinformation, cyber-espionage and other campaigns targeting Spanish entities.</p> <p>However, the "spill over" or cyber-retaliation on Western countries that many expected following the Russian invasion and sanctions put in place by NATO members has largely failed to materialize.</p> <p>In fact, cyber is just one part of the Russian arsenal. GCHQ boss Jeremy Fleming said late last week that a "cyber Pearl Harbor" was never likely to happen in Ukraine as such efforts are not central to Russia's military doctrine.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 Activist admits Calif. county website hack
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/activist-california-county-website/
GIST	<p>An activist has admitted carrying out a cyber-attack that shut down a California County's website more than a decade ago.</p> <p>Christopher Doyon initially pleaded not guilty to being involved in the distributed denial of service (DDoS) attack that closed down Santa Cruz County's site on December 16 2010. However, the 57-year-old former resident of Mountain View, California, changed his plea to guilty on Tuesday, when he appeared before district judge Beth Labson Freeman</p> <p>Doyon was indicted on September 21 2011, for conspiracy to cause intentional damage to a protected computer and deliberate damage to a protected computer, aiding and abetting.</p> <p>According to the 2011 indictment, the DDoS attack was perpetrated as part of "Operation Peace Camp 2010,"— a protest held in retaliation for Santa Cruz banning camping within the city limits.</p> <p>Santa Cruz County officials estimated that the attack on their computer network caused approximately \$4060 worth of damage.</p>

	<p>Doyon, who calls himself Commander X, was arrested in 2011 and later released on a \$35K bond but failed to appear for a federal court hearing scheduled for February 2012.</p> <p>After initially fleeing to Canada, Doyon was eventually arrested in Mexico on June 11 2021 by the county's immigration authorities. Doyon was then deported to the United States, where FBI agents took him into custody on June 12.</p> <p>In his plea agreement, Doyon reportedly admits to being embroiled in other cyber-attacks waged against computer servers in Orlando, Florida, in July 2011 after the City of Orlando started requiring organizers feeding large groups of homeless people in local parks to obtain a permit for their charitable efforts.</p> <p>After law enforcement arrested members of Food Not Bombs, Doyon orchestrated cyber-attacks against several Orlando websites, including the site for city government, the chamber of commerce and the county sheriff's office site.</p> <p>Doyon pleaded guilty to charges of criminal conspiracy to intentionally damage a protected computer; two counts of intentional damage to the protected computer; and failure to appear after pre-trial release.</p> <p>The United States Attorney's Office will reportedly recommend that Doyon, who will be sentenced on June 28 2022, serve a 15-year custodial term.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 Jail releases suspects; computer glitch
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/jail-releases-300-suspects-computer/
GIST	<p>A Texas jail has ordered the release of nearly 300 defendants after a computer glitch disrupted processing procedures and probable cause hearings.</p> <p>Harris County jail's cloud-based computer system known as JWEB was knocked offline for two days due to an issue with a system update.</p> <p>Under state law, defendants charged with misdemeanors may not be held for processing for more than 24 hours. For defendants charged with felonies, the cut-off period for processing is 48 hours.</p> <p>Harris County magistrate Courtney St. Julian said the computer system "was not operational from March 24 at around 7 pm until March 26 at around 9 pm."</p> <p>Harris County officials reportedly said the system had crashed five times since August and that the same issue with processing had arisen on three previous occasions, none of which were reported to the public.</p> <p>The district attorney's office requested an extension to processing times, but St. Julian denied the request.</p> <p>The Texan reports that individuals arrested on suspicion of theft, making terrorist threats or indecently exposing themselves were among those released because of the outage.</p> <p>Law enforcement agencies have been told by the district attorney's office that they will need to refile charges for the released defendants and that some individuals must now be re-arrested.</p> <p>"This case highlights the need for a solid and coordinated disaster recovery and business continuity plan for the JWEB system," Jason Hicks, field CISO, executive advisor at Coalfire told Infosecurity Magazine</p> <p>"The county needs to get a plan in place and conduct regular testing to ensure something like this does not occur in the future. All of the affected agencies should be included in the plans and testing so that there is consensus and awareness."</p>

	<p>JWEB was installed in 2015 and is used by the local law enforcement agencies, the district attorney's office, the district clerk, pretrial services, the public defender's office and the courts.</p> <p>John Bambenek, principal threat hunter at Netenrich, said that the outage demonstrated that "moving to the cloud alone is not sufficient to ensure security."</p> <p>"As more and more organizations outsource to cloud providers, they are creating opportunities for debilitating outages that cripple critical business operations," said Bambenek.</p> <p>He added: "It's hard to see how this outage could be much worse."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 WhatsApp voice message phishing emails
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/whatsapp-voice-message-phishing-emails-push-info-stealing-malware/
GIST	<p>A new WhatsApp phishing campaign impersonating WhatsApp's voice message feature has been discovered, attempting to spread information-stealing malware to at least 27,655 email addresses.</p> <p>This phishing campaign aims to lead the recipient through a series of steps that will ultimately end with the installation of an information-stealing malware infection, opening the way to credential theft.</p> <p>Information-stealing malware is aggressively distributed today via various means, with phishing remaining a primary channel for threat actors.</p> <p>The information stolen by these special-purpose malware tools is predominately account credentials stored in browsers and applications but also targets cryptocurrency wallets, SSH keys, and even files stored on the computer.</p> <p>WhatsApp voice messages as a lure</p> <p>The new WhatsApp voice message phishing campaign was discovered by researchers at Armorblox, who are constantly on the lookout for new phishing threats.</p> <p>For years, WhatsApp has had the ability to send voice messages to users in groups and private chats, with the feature receiving new enhancements last week.</p> <p>A timely phishing attack pretends to be a notification from WhatsApp stating that they received a new private message. This email features an embedded "Play" button and audio clip duration and creation time details.</p> <p>The sender, masquerading as a "Whatsapp Notifier" service, is using an email address belonging to the Center for Road Safety of the Moscow Region.</p> <p>Due to this being a genuine and legitimate entity, the messages aren't flagged or blocked by email security solutions, which typically is the biggest problem for phishing actors.</p> <p>Armorblox believes this is a case of the hackers having somehow exploited the domain to promote their purpose, so the organization plays a role without knowledge.</p> <p>If the recipient clicks on the "Play" button in the message body, they are redirected to a website that serves an allow/block prompt for installing a JS/Kryptic trojan.</p> <p>To trick the victim into clicking on "Allow," the threat actors display a web page stating that you need to click 'Allow' to confirm you are not a robot. However, clicking these allow buttons will subscribe the user to browser notifications that send in-browser advertisements for scams, adult sites, and malware.</p>

This simple trick can be very effective with people who are not consciously aware or thinking twice about their actions online.

Once the “allow” option is pressed, the browser will prompt the user to install the payload, which in this case is an information-stealing malware.

How to protect yourself

The fact that the emails in this campaign bypassed numerous secure email solutions makes it a particularly nasty case, but the clues that it was phishing were still abundant.

First, the email address has nothing to do with WhatsApp, and the same goes for the landing URL that requests the victims to click “Allow” to confirm they’re real. They are both obviously out of WhatsApp’s domain space.

Secondly, voice messages received on WhatsApp are [downloaded automatically](#) in the client app, so the IM company would never inform you about receiving one via email.

Thirdly, the phishing email features no WhatsApp logo, which is almost certainly to avoid having trouble with the [VMC checks](#) introduced by Gmail last year.

To protect yourself from phishing attempts, always take your time to look into potential signs of fraud when receiving messages that make surprising claims, and never jump into action.

If you need to check something, do it yourself through the official website or application, and never by following URLs or instructions provided in the message.

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HEADLINE	04/04 Russians access Western news sources
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/technology/russians-bypass-website-blocks-to-access-western-news-sources/
GIST	<p>Cloudflare sees signs of Russians increasingly turning to Western news sources to get accurate information about the situation in Ukraine.</p> <p>A new blog post published today by Cloudflare presents statistical evidence that the netizens of Russia are adopting blockage circumvention tools pretty aggressively to access British, American, and French news sites.</p> <p>At the same time, the Russian government appears unwilling to isolate the country from the global internet, as many suggested was the plan, and also unable to ramp up its resource access blockages due to quality issues.</p> <p>However, Russia has blocked access to Western media outlets and social sites to control the narrative regarding its invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Turning to reliable news sources</p> <p>As the war in Ukraine continues and Russian media is not providing evidence of success or even convincing justification for the so-called special military operation, many Russians are attempting to bypass blocks to learn more from Western news outlets.</p> <p>In March, Russia's most downloaded mobile apps were various VPN tools, Telegram, and Cloudflare's own "WARP / 1.1.1.1", a privacy-focused recursive DNS resolver that can route users' requests through one of the firm's servers.</p> <p>WARP protects DNS requests from being monitored by internet service providers (ISPs), protects against DNS poisoning, and offers intelligent features like malware filtering.</p>

By analyzing the usage stats from WARP, Cloudflare has seen a rise in Russia-based use, starting from early March. Most of the DNS lookups coming from that market concern large French, British, and U.S.-based newspapers.

"The picture is clear from these (three) charts. Russians want access to non-Russian news sources, and based on the popularity of private Internet access tools and VPNs, they are willing to work to get it" explains Cloudflare in a [blog post](#) about the new research.

DDoS attacks originating from Russia

Cloudflare also reports a spike in DDoS activity, culminating at around the second week of March, originating from inside Russia.

DDoS activity detected and mitigated by Cloudflare

According to the blog post, these attacks targeted sites outside Russia but were mitigated at the source, which is easier and more effective.

However, the internet giant clarifies that origin doesn't necessarily equal attribution, especially when the attacks are from DDoS botnets relying on compromised IoT devices.

Cloudflare's vindication

A month ago, Cloudflare announced [special data protection measures](#) in response to the war, including the wiping of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus-based servers in the case of a power loss or extensive internet connection disruption.

Simultaneously, the firm announced its decision not to exit the Russian market as that would hurt freedom and make accessing truthful and reliable information from within the country a lot harder.

Cloudflare's latest DNS stats vindicate its stance, which raised criticism at the time, as providing support to Russians has helped raise awareness of what is happening in Ukraine.

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HEADLINE	04/04 Tax day approaches, beware of tax scams
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/remote-workforce/5-tax-scams-to-watch-out-for-before-tax-day-
GIST	<p>Tax Day may be on April 18, but cybercriminals and scammers have been at it for the past several months trying to dupe taxpayers.</p> <p>The job falls to security teams to heighten awareness of potential threats to employees so they are aware of the latest scams that target W-9s, W-2s, and IRS form CP80, the refund form.</p> <p>"Companies can prepare for these scams by warning their users of the increased risk but also ensuring that backups are up to date and tested, lateral movement options – especially for users who are still working from home – are limited, and internal patching and segmentation is up to date," says Casey Ellis, founder and CTO at Bugcrowd.</p> <p>Most savvy companies likely already have been prepping for tax scams. But here's a rundown of the biggest threats this 2022 tax season.</p> <p>Spoofs of Popular Financial Apps</p> <p>This tax season hackers are targeting popular fintech apps and spoofing their tax notifications, according to a blog post by Avanan. Starting in February, Avanan researchers found hackers were spoofing trending fintech apps, such as Stash and Public, to steal credentials and, in the process, give victims a false sense of security that they've put together the correct tax documents.</p>

Stash is a personal finance app, while Public is used for online investing. In both hacks, victims are sent an email that a new tax document is ready for them. When a victim clicks on the link, they are sent to a credential-harvesting site.

Emotet Tax Scams

As early as March 14, Emotet returned to its old tax-season hunting grounds with a new twist: sending out phishing emails using W-9 tax form lures to deliver Emotet payloads, according to a [blog post](#) from Cofense Intelligence.

Joseph Gallop, intelligence analysis manager at Cofense, says Emotet uses the IRS logo, a specific mention of the organization employing individual recipients, and a password with which to extract the attached password-protected archives. When the Office macro spreadsheets enclosed in the archives are opened, they request to be enabled. Once they are, Emotet .dll files are then delivered to the victim's computer.

"Even though they took [Emotet down](#), we published a report that said that Emotet had the ability based on its relationships with other malware operators, particularly TrickBot, that they could use TrickBot to load Emotet and rebuild their botnet," says Gallop. "We saw them pick back up in November with testing things using old email addresses, conversations from old email inboxes. Then in February they took it up a notch and are back to pre-takedown volume, where they are sending out tens to hundreds of thousands of emails a day."

Attackers are merely using a common form that people would recognize and click on, says Sherrod DeGrippo, vice president of threat research and detection at Proofpoint.

"There's no real significance to the W-9 other than that the attackers know people would know that form and click on it," DeGrippo explains. "The goal is not to get the victim to fill out the form. It's to load the malware and steal sensitive data."

Social Engineering Emails and Voice Calls

Alongside targeted email campaigns, threat actors still go old-school and make phone calls claiming to be from the IRS or a collection agency. Scammers have become very crafty, using stolen data, such as actual Social Security numbers, to appear legitimate, experts say.

During tax season, the prime targets for tax refund scams are green card holders, small-business owners, new taxpayers under the age of 25, and taxpayers over 60, according to FortiGuard Labs. Threat actors assume these people are less informed about tax policies and what to expect and are therefore more vulnerable to falling for social engineering.

1040 and W-2 Form Scams

There are thousands of live malicious tax scams in SMS, email, and on Web applications, says Atif Mushtaq, founder and chief product officer at SlashNext. Most are focused on identity theft, credential-stealing, business email compromise (BEC), and account takeover, he says. These social engineering attacks ask people to upload their 1040 to verify their identification. Tax returns include personally identifiable information, including Social Security numbers, addresses, and sometimes bank account information.

Here's an example of a real BEC scam using a W-2 form lure:

Hi,

I'm entering tax information for the staff of our company, and I need employees' W-2s. Would you please send them to me ASAP?Thanks

And:

Please send our W-2 Tax Documents for all employees to Tom Heald at Strategic Tax Consultants. I have cc'd him here.

IRS CP80 Form Scams

In a [recent blog](#), Digital Shadows warned security teams about a tax season scam using a CP80 form allegedly sent by the IRS. As part of the scam, a letter recipient is told that they have credit in their tax account that they will lose it if they don't respond.

Playing on a person's desire not to lose out money allegedly owed to them, the scammers then tell the victim to send their signed tax return to the "address shown above" in the letter. Keep in mind that most unexpected correspondence purportedly from the IRS is most likely not legitimate.

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HEADLINE	04/04 WordPress overtakes Magento in skimmers
SOURCE	https://blog.sucuri.net/2022/04/wordpress-overtakes-magento-in-credit-card-skimmers.html?web_view=true
GIST	<p>MageCart derives its name from the eCommerce CMS platform Magento, which we've written about extensively on this blog. MageCart credit card theft malware as we know it today has its origins roughly around 2014/2015, and the attacks have evolved since then to include other platforms such as OpenCart, Prestashop, and – more recently – WordPress. In checking our SiteCheck data, we can see that as of July 2021, WordPress has overtaken Magento in the total number of detected credit card skimmers.</p> <p>There are a couple of caveats to this data, namely that it only includes outward-facing skimmers (and not PHP, backend skimmers) and also doesn't include simple <code><script</code> injections from exfiltration domains. However, the trend shifting toward WordPress / WooCommerce is still clear as day.</p> <h3>Only a Matter of Time</h3> <p>Our first mention of WordPress credit card skimming goes as far back as 2013, and then more recently in 2019 when we started to see the platform more and more frequently targeted with these types of attacks.</p> <p>According to statistics provided by Barn2, as of this year 2022 roughly 40% of eCommerce websites use WooCommerce (the most popular WordPress eCommerce plugin) as their platform.</p> <p>Attackers follow the money, so it was only a matter of time before they shifted their focus toward the most popular eCommerce platform on the web. I'm only surprised that it took this long for it to happen!</p> <p>Attackers likely initially started targeting the Magento platform due to its focus as a purpose-built eCommerce platform. 100% of Magento websites are going to be handling payment information, whereas only a much smaller portion of WordPress websites will be doing the same. However, it's fairly easy to determine whether or not a WordPress website is eCommerce, based on the site pages such as <i>checkout</i>, <i>cart</i>, and <i>account</i>, for example.</p> <p>Attackers seem to have gotten wise to this, and it shows in the data.</p> <h3>What Types of Skimmers?</h3> <p>Three main malware signatures account for roughly 40% of all detected credit card skimmers since January 2021. All three of them are most commonly found on WordPress websites.</p> <p>Let's take a look at them, shall we?</p> <h3>Spoofed Checkout Page</h3> <p>This malware we wrote about last year. It generates a fake checkout page on any URL...The malware is typically injected into the <i>header.php</i> file of the active theme on the websites, and contains a base64 encoded payload:</p> <p>The exfiltration domain used in the attack is <i>apijquery[.]com</i> and we can see that the malware is still very much active today.</p> <h3>Fake Google Analytics Script</h3>

Coming in second place is a bogus/fake Google Analytics injected script. At first glance it appears to be a regular Google Analytics script, which is nearly ubiquitous on the web. However, readers with a keen eye will notice the very same *atob()* function being used to encode the exfiltration domain.

This malware is typically injected into the database, which can be easily achieved through the WordPress admin dashboard via the use of *widgets*, or by injecting the *wp_posts* content of the checkout page.

In this case, the exfiltration domain is *ajaxstatic[.]com*, or at least it was when the malware was first identified. They have likely moved on to new domains for more recent infections.

Bogus Facebook Tracking Pixel

Clocking in at third place is a credit card skimmer masquerading as a Facebook / Meta tracking pixel, also injected into victim databases.

Once again, we see the same *atob()* obfuscation and the exfiltration domain was *formstats[.]j.us*

Another base64 encoded component of the malware decodes to *checkout* so that the only time the malware will load is on the *checkout* page, making it slightly more difficult to detect.

What Happens to the Stolen Cards?

All of these credit card skimmers are JavaScript-based, meaning they execute in the victim's browser. They display outwardly on the website, which makes them identifiable to SiteCheck. This is one reason why it's common for them to masquerade as legitimate JavaScript properties like Google Analytics and Facebook Tracking.

By comparison, PHP-based skimmers work in the back-end and spirit away the credit card details using PHP functions such as *cURL*. These are not visible to browsers or external scanners like SiteCheck.

When the unsuspecting eCommerce customer places an order on the compromised checkout page, the payment details will also be sent to the attacker's exfiltration domain or IP address. The JavaScript code on the third-party server will typically specify exactly what information to steal, usually including the credit card number, expiration date, address, city, postal/ZIP code, and anything else that is typically entered into the checkout page and useful for using a stolen card.

Once enough card numbers are stolen, attackers will also quite often test the credit cards on other eCommerce websites. A small \$1 transaction will be conducted to confirm that the card is still active. Once confirmed, they are sold on the black market. Stolen card details are surprisingly cheap, sometimes as low as \$3-5 apiece. The low price is due to the fact that these cards have a very short shelf life and are often cancelled by the card holder or frozen by the financial institution shortly after they notice suspicious activity.

In Conclusion

Even with only a ~10% eCommerce market share Magento stayed at the top of detected credit card swipers well into 2021. Given that WooCommerce has been the market share leader for quite some time I'm surprised that it took this long for the attackers to shift their focus.

This is not to say that there is anything inherently wrong with WordPress or WooCommerce – they are both excellent pieces of software – it simply goes to show that the attackers go after wherever they can make a profit. Threat researchers should also take note and adjust the focus accordingly as well.

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HEADLINE	04/04 Hacker groups capitalize on Ukraine war
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/04/multiple-hacker-groups-capitalizing-on.html?&web_view=true

GIST	<p>At least three different advanced persistent threat (APT) groups from across the world have launched spear-phishing campaigns in mid-March 2022 using the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war as a lure to distribute malware and steal sensitive information.</p> <p>The campaigns, undertaken by El Machete, Lyceum, and SideWinder, have targeted a variety of sectors, including energy, financial, and governmental sectors in Nicaragua, Venezuela, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan.</p> <p>"The attackers use decoys ranging from official-looking documents to news articles or even job postings, depending on the targets and region," Check Point Research said in a report. "Many of these lure documents utilize malicious macros or template injection to gain an initial foothold into the targeted organizations, and then launch malware attacks."</p> <p>The infection chains of El Machete, a Spanish-speaking threat actor first documented in August 2014 by Kaspersky, involve the use of macro-laced decoy documents to deploy an open-source remote access trojan called Loki.Rat that's capable of harvesting keystrokes, credentials, and clipboard data as well as carrying out file operations and executing arbitrary commands.</p> <p>A second campaign is from the Iranian APT group known as Lyceum that Check Point said launched a phishing attack using an email purportedly about "Russian war crimes in Ukraine" to deliver first-stage .NET and Golang droppers, which are then used to deploy a backdoor for running files retrieved from a remote server.</p> <p>Another example is SideWinder, a state-sponsored hacking crew that's said to operate in support of Indian political interests and with a specific focus on its neighbors China and Pakistan. The attack sequence, in this case, employs a weaponized document that exploits the Equation Editor flaw in Microsoft Office (CVE-2017-11882) to distribute an information stealing malware.</p> <p>The findings echo similar warnings from Google's Threat Analysis Group (TAG), which disclosed that nation-state-backed threat groups from Iran, China, North Korea, and Russia and numerous other criminal and financially motivated actors are leveraging war-related themes in phishing campaigns, online extortion attempts, and other malicious activities.</p> <p>"Although the attention of the public does not usually linger on a single issue for an extended period, the Russian-Ukrainian war is an obvious exception," the Israeli company said. "This war affects multiple regions around the world and has potentially far-reaching ramifications. As a result, we can expect that APT threat actors will continue to use this crisis to conduct targeted phishing campaigns for espionage purposes."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 'Free Easter chocolate basket' is a scam
SOURCE	https://blog.malwarebytes.com/social-engineering/2022/04/free-easter-chocolate-basket-is-a-social-media-scam-after-your-personal-details/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>Holidays inspire fraudsters and scammers to create timely and effective ways to string people along and get them to give up either their money or their personal information. This is the case in this chocolate-themed scam.</p> <p>Cadbury UK has issued a warning to its 315,000 followers on Twitter about a scam making the rounds on WhatsApp and other social media sites like Facebook.</p> <p>Users of WhatsApp have reported receiving links to a web page where they can claim a "free Cadbury easter chocolate basket."</p> <p>When they open the link, users are presented with a short list of questions to answer—purportedly as part of an "Easter Egg Hunt"—before they are prompted to enter their personal details.</p>

Return to Top	<p>The Dorset Police Cyber Crime Unit posted an appeal about this scam to its Facebook page.</p> <p>“DON’T CLICK THE LINK.” the post reads, the text bookended with the warning sign emoji. “Our Cyber Protect Officer has done it for you.”</p> <p>The post continues with how the scam works:</p> <p>“The site looks fairly convincing, however the only buttons that actually work are the ones to answer the questions. The search icon and the three little lines do nothing at all.</p> <p>Once you answer those question [sic], you’re taken to a little game where you have to ‘find your prize’. Conveniently, your first and second tries won’t be successful, but you’ll ‘win’ on your third go! At that point, to claim your “prize”, you’ll be asked to hand over all sorts of personal information. That’s where the scam comes in!”</p> <p>Looking at the shortened URL link (“tinyurl2.ru”) used in this campaign and how this scam campaign itself was formatted, it resembles the Amazon International Women’s Day 2022 Giveaway scam that is said to have gone viral in February.</p> <p>It’s highly likely that scam links similar to these two can only be accessed via mobile devices.</p> <p>This isn’t the first time Cadbury’s name has been dragged into a scam campaign. On December 2021, a Facebook scam about Cadbury reportedly giving away hampers of chocolate for Christmas did the rounds.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 Emma Sleep Co. confirms cyberattack
SOURCE	https://www.theregister.com/2022/04/04/emma_the_sleep_company_admits/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Emma Sleep Company has confirmed to <i>The Reg</i> that it suffered a Magecart attack which enabled ne'er-do-wells to skim customers' credit or debit card data from its website.</p> <p>Customers were informed of the breach by the mattress maker via email in the past week, with the business saying it was "subject to a cyber attack leading to the theft of personal data" but not specifying in the message when it discovered the digital burglary.</p> <p>"This was a sophisticated, targeted cyber-attack on the checkout process on our website and personal information entered, including credit card data, may have been stolen, whether you completed your purchase or not," the email to customers states.</p> <p>The company confirmed to us it was a Magecart attack via the ubiquitous Adobe Magento e-commerce platform.</p> <p>"This Magecart attack, which affected customers in 12 countries, involved a malicious piece of code that was added to checkout pages which would skim card data from within a user's browser. The attack was highly targeted, and the attacker created copy-cat URLs tailored to our environment."</p> <p>The spokesperson said they could confirm that the "platform was kept up to date with all relevant security fixes."</p> <p>In a classic Magecart attack, such as the one that exposed 40 million British Airways customers' data in 2018 (and for which it was fined £20m/\$26m), dodgy folk use skimming techniques to pilfer punters' credit or debit card data.</p> <p>Operatives get access to a site, either directly or via third-party services, and inject malicious JavaScript which then nabs the information as it is input.</p>

Emma Sleep Company confirmed that its security measures had been "circumvented in a technically advanced way by how the Javascript code was implemented and loaded dynamically from the attacker's server and through highly sophisticated evasion techniques to avoid detection, as well as elaborate countermeasures to (unsuccessfully) prevent analysis, which is why the technology we had in place to keep track of scripts added to the page did not detect it."

It added: "Additional capabilities to detect such attacks have now been deployed. We are also in the process of implementing new CORS and CSP headers."

In February this year, Adobe issued [two](#) out-of-bounds [patches](#) in a single week when critical security bugs affecting its Magento/Adobe Commerce product emerged, with the vendor warning the vulns were being actively exploited.

Emma Sleep Company's CEO, Dennis Schmoltzi, confirmed in a statement to *The Register* that the cyber-attack "on the checkout process on our website" had occurred "between 27 January 2022 and 22 March 2022."

Schmoltzi added: "Personal customer information, including credit card data, was stolen. While we never process or store credit card data ourselves, the type of attack was redirecting information as it was typed into form fields in the browser of the user. As of today, we are not aware of any successful abuse of this data."

"As soon as we became aware of this attack, we took immediate action to remove the threat and ensure the security of data, launched a full investigation, and reported this to the relevant authorities, including the police. We also directly contacted all those customers who may have been affected."

CTO Andreas Westendörpf was [interviewed](#) talking about scaling up the company's Magento e-commerce solution in January. He told retail digitalization trade mag Location Insider (translated from German): "Magento has been continuously adapted and expanded over the years. In addition, more and more solutions were added that go in the direction of ERP and supply chain."

Patch now

Needless to say, if you are looking after an Adobe/Magento shop and haven't yet patched, the time to do so is now. The relevant Adobe security bulletin is [here](#).

Currently there is "no evidence" personal or payment data has been abused in the wild, the company said to customers in the email. Nevertheless, it advised them to contact their banks or credit card provider and "follow their advice," and check for unusual or suspicious activity from the date of visiting the checkout page on Emma's website.

One customer that shared the email on the condition of anonymity said: "Apparently getting a good night's sleep means you now might not get a good night's sleep."

This isn't the finest moment for a rapidly expanding business that turned over [\\$731m in 2021](#), up 59 per cent year-on-year – its eight fiscal year since being founded. It designs and makes "all-foam bed-in-a-box mattresses," a commodity that was seemingly in demand as people looked to make their homes more comfortable while under extended COVID lockdowns.

The German company operates in 18 countries including the US and China, and says it has won 75 awards for its sleep products.

Emma Sleep Company noted that it could answer all of our questions while police investigations continue. A spokesperson at the ICO - Britain's data watchdog - said: "People have the right to expect that organisations will handle their personal information securely and responsibly."

	"Emma, the sleep company has made us aware of an incident and we are assessing the information provided."
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HEADLINE	04/05 Mailchimp confirms breach, stolen data
SOURCE	https://www.theregister.com/2022/04/05/mailchimp_confirms_breach/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Mailchimp has confirmed a miscreant gained access to one of its internal tools and used it to steal data belonging to 100-plus high-value customers.</p> <p>The clients were all in cryptocurrency and finance-related industries, according to Mailchimp. "Our findings show that this was a targeted incident," the mailing-list giant's CISO Siobhan Smyth said in a statement to The Register on Monday.</p> <p>Rumors of the intrusion surfaced on Twitter over the weekend: on Sunday, hardware cryptocurrency wallet maker Trezor, whose website is trezor.io, warned someone was sending out emails from <code>noreply[at]trezor[dot]us</code> containing a link to malware designed to harvest wallet owners' information.</p> <p>Less than an hour later, Trezor said it managed to get the domain names associated with the scam disabled, and that MailChimp said its service had been "compromised by an insider targeting crypto companies."</p> <p>According to Trezor, a fraudster emailed its mailing-list subscribers claiming there had been a security breach, and that a new version of Trezor's software had to be downloaded and run. The message linked to what was said to be the latest Trezor Suite application, but the executable was in fact bogus, and instead sought to obtain a victim's recovery seed for their wallet and possibly other information.</p> <p>Presumably, someone compromised Mailchimp to extract the email addresses of everyone who had signed up to Trezor's Mailchimp-managed mailing list, and then spammed out the phishing mail to those addresses. We're told the fraudster accessed some 319 Mailchimp accounts, and exfiltrated "audience data" from 102 of them.</p> <p>According to Smyth, Mailchimp's security engineers became aware of the break-in on March 26 after a cybercriminal gained access to a tool that the Mailchimp customer-facing teams use for customer support and account administration.</p> <p>"The incident was propagated by an external actor who conducted a successful social engineering attack on Mailchimp employees, resulting in employee credentials being compromised," she explained. In other words, someone outside gained control of a worker's internal system account and used that to get at Mailchimp account data and subscribers' contact info.</p> <p>The email-slinging company terminated access to the compromised employee account, and "took steps to prevent additional employees from being affected," Smyth added.</p> <p>The company began an investigation into what happened, and also hired digital forensic experts for help. And during the course of that probe, Mailchimp determined that some accounts' API keys were potentially accessed by the intruder. These API keys could be used by an attacker to launch more phishing campaigns against Mailchimp mailing list subscribers.</p> <p>"Out of an abundance of caution, we disabled those API keys, implemented protections so they can't be re-enabled, and notified affected users," Smyth said.</p> <p>In addition to saying that Mailchimp notifies account owners of any unauthorized account access as soon as possible, Smyth recommended netizens adopt two-factor authentication to keep their online accounts secure.</p>

	<p>"We sincerely apologize to our users for this incident and realize that it brings inconvenience and raises questions for our users and their customers," she added. "We're confident in the security measures and robust processes we have in place to protect our users' data and prevent future incidents."</p> <p>Mailchimp is just the latest big firm to experience a computer security breach in recent months. It now joins the ranks of software consultancy Globant, mattress vendor Emma Sleep Company, and identity services provider Okta, among others.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 FIN7 evolves toolset; works w/ransom gangs
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/fin7-hackers-evolve-toolset-work-with-multiple-ransomware-gangs/
GIST	<p>Threat analysts have compiled a detailed technical report on FIN7 operations from late 2021 to early 2022, showing that the adversary continues to be very active, evolving, and trying new monetization methods.</p> <p>FIN7 (a.k.a. Carbanak) is a Russian-speaking, financially motivated actor known for its resourceful and diverse set of tactics, custom-made malware, and stealthy backdoors.</p> <p>Although some members of the group were indicted in 2018, followed by the sentencing of one of its managers in 2021, FIN7 did not disappear and kept developing new tools for stealthy attacks.</p> <p>A rich new set of FIN7 indicators of compromise based on the analysis of novel malware samples has been published by researchers at Mandiant, who continue to observe and track the group's operations.</p> <p>The evidence gathered from a range of cyber-intrusions has led the analysts to merge eight previously suspected UNC groups into FIN7, which indicates the broad scope of operations for the particular group.</p> <p>Evolution of toolset</p> <p>The PowerShell backdoor known as PowerPlant, which has been associated with FIN7 for years now, is still being developed into new variants, as Mandiant has identified version numbers ranging from 0.012 to 0.028.</p> <p>In some intrusions, FIN7 was observed tweaking the functionality and adding new features to PowerPlant, and deploying the new version in the middle of the operation.</p> <p>According to Mandiant, PowerPlant has replaced Loadout and Griffon in 2022 operations, while the Carbanak and Dicoloader malware have also taken a back seat.</p> <p>During deployment, PowerPlant fetches different modules from the C2 server, so the resulting set of capabilities varies. Two of the most commonly deployed modules are named Easylook and Boatlaunch.</p> <p>Easylook is a reconnaissance utility that FIN7 has used for at least two years to capture network and system information details like hardware, usernames, registration keys, operating system versions, domain data, etc.</p> <p>Boatlaunch is a helper module that patches PowerShell processes on the compromised systems with a 5-byte instruction sequence that results in an AMSI-bypass.</p> <p>AMSI (antimalware scan interface) is a built-in Microsoft tool that helps detect malicious PowerShell execution, so Boatlaunch is there to help prevent that. Mandiant has spotted both 32-bit and 64-bit module versions.</p> <p>Another new development is the evolution of the Birdwatch downloader, which has two variants now, named Crowview and Fowlgaze.</p>

Both variants are .NET-based, but contrary to Birdwatch, they feature self-deletion capabilities, come with embedded payloads, and support additional arguments.

Like Birdwatch, these new variants support retrieving payloads over HTTP and continue to offer basic reconnaissance operations that tell FIN7 what processes run on the system, what the network configuration is, and what web browser is used.

New ventures in ransomware

One interesting finding presented in Mandiant's report is FIN7's involvement with various ransomware gangs.

More specifically, the analysts have found evidence of FIN7 intrusions detected right before incidents with ransomware like Maze, Ryuk, Darkside, and BlackCat/ALPHV.

"In addition to evidence produced from intrusion data, secondary artifacts suggest FIN7 played a role in at least some DARKSIDE operations," says Mandiant

"A low global prevalence code signing certificate used by FIN7 in 2021 to sign BEACON and BEAKDROP samples were also used to sign multiple unattributed DARKSIDE samples recovered in the wild."

Last October, Bleeping Computer reported about FIN7's rising interest in ransomware operations when the group was exposed for setting up a phony pentesting firm to hire network intrusion specialists.

Whether FIN7 offers initial network access to ransomware gangs or operate as affiliates and use the aforementioned strains is unclear. Still, there's clear involvement of the adversary in ransomware operations.

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HEADLINE	04/04 'Cyber Front Z' defends Russia
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/7kbjny/russia-cyber-front-z-telegram
GIST	<p>Considering Russia spent the last decade waging an online information war against the West, it came as a surprise to many that, days into the invasion of Ukraine, Russia was the one losing the information war.</p> <p>But they were just getting started, and weeks after the war began, Kremlin allies deployed a new kind of troll farm.</p> <p>"Attention fighters," the administrator of the Cyber Front Z Telegram channel told their 65,000 followers on Thursday morning. The Ukrainian singer Jamala was, they said, worthy of an attack. She'd "arranged a photo shoot with the flag of Ukraine in Britain," the message continued. Jamala was targeted because she had posted a series of photographs on her Instagram account of celebrities like pop star Ed Sheeran and singer Gregory Porter holding a Ukrainian flag.</p> <p>The administrator, who goes by the name Aleksander Kapitanov, told group members to turn on their VPNs—to circumvent the Kremlin's ban on Instagram—and post comments ridiculing the singer. Group members were also instructed to reference a conspiracy theory the Kremlin has pushed in recent weeks alleging that the Ukrainian government perpetrated a genocide against Russian-speakers in the Donbas region.</p> <p>Headquartered in St. Petersburg, Cyber Front Z calls itself a "people's movement" working to defend Russia. In its rapidly growing Telegram channel, launched on March 11, the group claims it is simply working to combat the flood of fake news and disinformation coming from Ukraine, the U.S., and Western Europe about the invasion—or "special operation," as Kapitanov unfailingly refers to it.</p> <p>A review of the channel by VICE News found that the Cyber Front Z army is used to boost pro-Kremlin videos, commentary, and articles on sites like YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter. The group has pushed</p>

many of the baseless conspiracy theories and narratives that the Kremlin has supported throughout this war, including claims that Ukraine was developing bioweapons in conjunction with the U.S., that the Russian army was ridding Ukraine of Nazis, and that the Ukrainian military was firing on its own citizens.

The Telegram channel urges Russians to post comments, share pro-Kremlin content, and disparage anyone who criticizes Russian President Vladimir Putin. Kapitanov tells followers that posting such comments is a citizen's patriotic duty to support their military's war on Ukraine.

"We remind you that Ukrainian Nazis commit atrocities and will soon be punished for this," Kapitanov wrote on Thursday in another post. "We paint everything in the colors of the Russian tricolor and distribute our symbols Z and V."

This public army of trolls pushing disinformation across the internet is but one arm of Cyber Front Z's operation. A report published last week by independent St. Petersburg-based media outlet Fontanka revealed that behind all its patriotic rhetoric and claims of a popular movement of concerned citizens, it's just another Kremlin-linked troll farm, where people are paid to post disinformation in a targeted and coordinated manner.

"The Cyber Front Z channel openly calls on its 'supporters' to write comments under specific posts—mostly by Russian citizens and organizations that oppose the war—probably to create an impression that those comments are written by people who genuinely support Cyber Front and not by trolls who are paid by the state or one of the pro-Kremlin oligarchs," Julia Smirnova, an analyst at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, told VICE News. "However, the Fontanka investigation makes it clear that this is a classic troll factory, with people being paid for the comments."

Fontanka reporter Ksenia Klochkova went undercover as a paid troll at Cyber Front Z and was offered a monthly salary of around \$431.96. She was given access to fake accounts and instructed what to write and where to post her comments.

Klochkova took photos of the Cyber Front Z offices that show bean bags strewn across the floors and walls decorated with flags featuring the letter "Z." (The 26th letter of the English alphabet has been co-opted by nationalistic young Russians in recent weeks as a symbol of their support of the war and Putin, after Russian tanks emblazoned with the letter rolled into Ukraine last month.)

Klochkova reported that she was one of 100 people on her shift all doing the exact same thing: posting a minimum of 200 comments on content as directed by the Cyber Front Z supervisors, creating a flood of 20,000 pieces of supposedly organic pro-Kremlin content over a few hours.

Cyber Front Z, therefore, has two divisions: the public-facing Telegram channel where volunteers are directed to post disinformation under their own names across the internet, and a private professional troll army who are paid to post similar disinformation using fake identities. The end result is the same, with comments mimicking Kremlin narratives flooding Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube posts. All new recruits are asked to contact Kapitanov in order to join Cyber Front Z's troll army.

The Fontanka investigation was sparked by an advertisement placed on the Telegram channel seeking people to "fight back in the information field." The post is still pinned at the top of the channel, and says the group "welcomes everyone who is not indifferent and loves his Motherland."

It also says the group is looking for "social commentators, spammers, content analysts, programmers, IT specialists, and designers."

The group went public weeks into the war, at a time when Russia was facing losses on the battlefield and in the information war. But despite being launched relatively recently, it quickly amassed a huge and highly active following.

"Turn on your VPNs and fly into the ring," Kapitanov directed the members on Wednesday afternoon.

The target in “the ring” was an Instagram post by Temirlan Raimkulov, a little-known Kazakh boxer, who had posted a picture of himself with the Ukrainian flag draped over his shoulders after a bout in the U.S. last weekend. He had also called Putin a “murderer,” the admin alleged, though there’s no evidence to support that claim.

“We are writing to Temirlan that his unsportsmanlike behavior stems from the fact that he is falling for Ukrainian propaganda,” the admin wrote in the Telegram channel. The message included a reference to the Azov Battalion, a Ukrainian extremist movement notorious for its far-right ideology.

“You need to ask him where he was all these 8 years when Ukraine bombed the Donbas and why he was silent. Also, ask why Ukraine became the stronghold of the Nazi battalions. The ones that still terrorize the local population.”

A post on Tuesday urged members to support the work of Patrick Lancaster, a U.S. videographer who has defended Russia’s decision to invade Ukraine and boosted disinformation about the scale of the supposed Nazi issue in Ukraine.

The channel even runs competitions to see who can write the most patriotic comment on social media and rewards the person who achieves the most likes, shares, or reactions with merch from the Russian military’s online store. First prize in a competition this week was a T-shirt emblazoned with the letter “Z”, the runner-up prize was a T-shirt saying “Army of Russia,” and third place won a Cyber Front-branded baseball cap.

Kapitanov frames their work as almost militant, encouraging members to see themselves as an extension of the Russian military. One meme posted in the channel this week reimagines a keyboard as a grenade, to be used against Russia’s enemies online.

Soon after the Fontanka report was published, a link to the piece was posted to the Cyber Front Z Telegram channel along with a picture of Klochkova and a claim that she was working with the U.S. to infiltrate the group.

After Klochkova’s article was published, the group also said, without evidence, that someone tried to hack the Cyber Front Z account.

“We are convinced that the attempt to gain access to the channel and the investigation are events from the same source, one of the manifestations of the information war against Russia,” Kapitanov said.

It is unclear who’s bankrolling the Cyber Front Z operation, and Kapitanov did not respond to multiple requests for comment by VICE News. The Kremlin also didn’t respond to a request for comment about whether it was aware or had endorsed the actions of the group.

However, there is evidence that the Kremlin has some involvement in the operation.

When Klochkova didn’t show up for her second day of work earlier this month, she received a phone call asking if she would continue working on the project. Klochkova found that the number belonged to Aleksey Nekrilov, whom Fontanka reported was an employee for Glavset LLC, Mixinfo, and Novinfo, all three of which the U.S. government has listed as pseudonyms of the infamous St. Petersburg troll farm known as the Internet Research Agency.

In recent weeks, a man referred to simply as “Alexey” has given several interviews to Russian state-controlled media where he framed his group as a “people’s movement” that’s powered by volunteers rather than paid trolls.

“The organization, which works on a voluntary basis, includes several thousand people throughout Russia,” a recent report in state-backed news agency RIA Novosti said, citing Alexey as the “curator” of the group.

In an interview with RT, Alexey appeared on camera and said Cyber Front Z was born out of a need to combat disinformation supposedly being spread by Ukrainians.

“Despite the fact that the activity of the patriotic audience in our social networks has greatly increased, its work was less organized than the activity on the part of the Ukrainians,” he said. “That is why the idea was born to consolidate this patriotic audience and call on it to help the country on the internet in order to dispel Ukrainian propaganda, explain to people the goals and objectives of the operation, talk about the history of Donbas, broadcast opinion information about various actions in support of the special operation, in order to show that most of Russian society is on the side of the president’s army.”

Alexey failed to mention in either interview that Cyber Front Z is reportedly employing paid trolls to post up to 200 comments per day in support of Russian disinformation. Instead, he says that those interested can “become an employee of our analytical headquarters, which is located in St. Petersburg.”

However, Klochkova confirmed to VICE News that Alexey was not the man she met in St. Petersburg, who called himself Aleksander Kapitanov, and that he was not one of the people she met during her time working at the group’s headquarters, suggesting that Kapitanov is not the only person running this operation.

This level of openness about its disinformation campaigns is a relatively new phenomenon, said Smirnova, the analyst at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, who pointed out that Russian trolls had started to talk more openly about their work even before the war began.

Smirnova says the concept of “implausible deniability”—deniability so paper-thin that it’s often nothing more than a purely formal denial of state involvement—is helpful in trying to understand why Cyber Front Z is so open about what it’s doing, while also portraying itself as nothing more than an organic patriotic movement.

“So now, it’s usual that Russian trolls deny only direct state involvement in their work but not the work itself,” Smirnova said.

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HEADLINE	04/05 Germany shuts illegal darknet platform
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/germany-shuts-darknet-platform-specializing-drugs-83879870
GIST	<p>BERLIN -- German investigators on Tuesday shut down a Russian-language darknet marketplace that they say specialized in drug dealing, seizing bitcoin worth 23 million euros (\$25.3 million).</p> <p>Prosecutors in Frankfurt described the “Hydra Market” platform as the world’s biggest illegal darknet marketplace. They said they seized its server infrastructure in Germany.</p> <p>The shutdown was the result of investigations underway since August, in which U.S. authorities participated.</p> <p>The platform had been active at least since 2015, prosecutors said. They added that, as well as illegal drugs, forged documents, intercepted data and “digital services” were offered for sale. They said that it had about 17 million registered customer accounts and more than 19,000 registered sellers.</p> <p>Prosecutors said the platform had sales of at least 1.23 billion euros in 2020.</p>
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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	04/04 Colleyville hostage crisis: Aafia Siddiqui
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/the-colleyville-hostage-crisis-aafia-siddiquis-continued-pertinence-in-jihadi-terror-plots-against-the-united-states/
GIST	<p>On the morning of Saturday, January 15, 2022, at 10:00 AM local time, a man later identified as 44-year-old British national Malik Faisal Akram entered Congregation Beth Israel, a Jewish synagogue in Colleyville, Texas, and took four individuals hostage at gunpoint during a livestreaming of Shabbat morning services. Local police arrived at the scene at approximately 12:30 PM. During negotiations with police, Akram demanded the release of Dr. Aafia Siddiqui, a Pakistani neuroscientist who was convicted in 2010 of attempting to murder U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan. Siddiqui is currently serving an 86-year sentence at a federal prison in nearby Fort Worth, Texas.</p> <p>Throughout the hostage crisis, Akram espoused anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, told hostages that he expected to be “going to Jannah [heaven]” after the conclusion of the standoff, and repeatedly demanded to talk to Siddiqui. At 5:00 PM, Akram released one hostage but continued to hold three others as negotiations with the FBI, local police, and his own family continued. One hostage—the congregation’s rabbi, Charlie Cytron-Walker—reported that Akram became “increasingly belligerent and threatening” in the later parts of the standoff. At around 9:00 PM, two FBI Hostage Rescue Teams (HRT), which had arrived on the scene earlier that day after being mobilized by the FBI in the early hours of the crisis, prepared to breach the synagogue. Shortly thereafter, at 9:33PM local time, Texas Governor Greg Abbott and local police sources confirmed that the HRT breached the synagogue and that the remaining hostages escaped unharmed. During the rescue, Akram was shot and killed by HRT officers. In total, the standoff lasted 11 hours.</p> <p>The FBI’s Joint Terrorism Taskforce is currently investigating the Colleyville hostage crisis as “a terrorism-related matter, in which the Jewish community was targeted.” In the weeks following the attack, law enforcement investigations in the United States and United Kingdom and reporting by international media have uncovered additional information about Akram’s background, motives, planning process, and travel from the United Kingdom. Prior to the attack, Akram’s longstanding financial problems, criminal record, and mental health issues were well-known to the local community in his hometown of Blackburn, as was his involvement in the conservative Islamist Tablighi Jamaat movement. According to media reports, he was a known figure to British counterterrorism authorities, having been the subject of a 2001 court exclusion order for making threatening comments about the 9/11 attacks, two referrals to the British counter-extremism program PREVENT in 2016 and 2019, and a 2020 counterterrorism investigation by MI5.</p> <p>Despite this, White House press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters that “the U.S. government did not have any derogatory information” about Akram when he arrived in the United States at New York’s John F. Kennedy International Airport on December 29, 2021. After his arrival, Akram reportedly traveled to Dallas around New Year’s Day, stayed in several homeless shelters in the area between January 1 and January 15, and purchased the Taurus Model G2C semiautomatic pistol used in the hostage-taking two days before the attack. FBI and British law enforcement investigations into Akram’s pre-incident planning are ongoing. On January 26, 2022, the U.S. Department of Justice charged the individual who allegedly sold Akram the pistol he used in the hostage-taking with unlawful possession of a firearm. Throughout January 2022, police in the United Kingdom arrested six individuals in Manchester and Birmingham in connection with the Colleyville incident, including two of Akram’s teenage sons; all were eventually released without charge.</p> <p>While more details about Akram and the Colleyville siege are likely forthcoming, the initial information, confirmed by the FBI, that Akram demanded Siddiqui’s release connects his plot to dozens of attempts by jihadi groups and their supporters in the West toward freeing Siddiqui from U.S. federal prison. To this end, this article examines the enduring role of Siddiqui’s case for American jihadis, evaluating the Colleyville hostage crisis within the context of over a decade of jihadi efforts to secure her release from prison through various means. Beginning with a brief summary of Siddiqui’s case and role in the jihadi</p>

	movement, the article then explains how freeing Siddiqui has become a <i>cause célèbre</i> for jihadis around the world, particularly in the West. It then evaluates the Colleyville siege alongside other American jihadi plots with a nexus to Siddiqui since her arrest, documenting instances of attack plots with inspirational ties to Siddiqui and attempts by Americans to secure her release through attacking prisons and taking hostages. Finally, the article offers a brief assessment of what the Colleyville hostage crisis and its linkages to Siddiqui might augur for future jihadi activity in the United States.
Return to Top	Read more at CTC Sentinel How “Free Aafia Siddiqui” Became a Jihadi Cause Célèbre

Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	04/04 Yellowstone national park pass: entry 2172
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/apr/04/yellowstone-national-park-annual-inheritance-pass
GIST	<p>Yellowstone national park is offering an annual pass valid for entry in 2172 in exchange for a \$1,500 donation, part of a fundraising efforts in honor of the park’s 150th birthday.</p> <p>The park hopes that the tickets, dubbed “The Inheritance Passes”, will be used by the donor’s descendants. Yellowstone Forever, the park’s fundraising arm, will use the money to support park projects such as trail improvements, education, native fish conservation and scientific studies.</p> <p>“It is our way of celebrating 150 years of Yellowstone national park and to help preserve the park for the next 150 years,” Lisa Diekmann, president and CEO of Yellowstone Forever, told The Billings Gazette.</p> <p>The concept was created by the Havas Chicago advertising agency.</p> <p>Rather than looking back to celebrate the park’s 150th anniversary, Havas Chicago said they thought it would be the perfect time to look ahead and think about ways to preserve the park for future generations.</p> <p>The Inheritance Passes will be annual valid for entry into Yellowstone in 2172. Donors will also receive a pass to enter Yellowstone that is good for a period of a year after its first use, said Wendie Carr, chief marketing officer for Yellowstone Forever.</p> <p>Yellowstone, America’s first national park, celebrated its 150th anniversary on 1 March. The milestone comes as the park and its caretakers grapple with a host of challenges, including the climate crisis and the pressures of surging visitation.</p> <p>Longtime “winterkeeper” Steven Fuller said in February the changes he’s seen over the past four decades have been “profound”. Animals such as bison, wolves and grizzly bears made a comeback, for instance, but there is also more traffic and weather extremes.</p> <p>“It’s difficult sometimes to sort out the paradoxes,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 UN: time short, stop climate change doable
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/04/climate/climate-change-ipcc-un.html
GIST	<p>Nations need to move away much faster from fossil fuels to retain any hope of preventing a perilous future on an overheated planet, according to a major new report on climate change released on Monday, although they have made some progress because of the falling costs of clean energy.</p> <p>The report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a body of experts convened by the United Nations, warns that unless countries drastically accelerate efforts over the next few years to slash their emissions from coal, oil and natural gas, the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, or 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit, will likely be out of reach by the end of this decade.</p>

That's the threshold beyond which scientists say the [dangers of global warming](#) — including worsening floods, droughts, wildfires and ecosystem collapse — grow considerably. Humans have already heated the planet by an average of 1.1 degrees Celsius since the 19th century, largely by burning fossil fuels for energy.

But the task is daunting: Holding warming [to just 1.5 degrees Celsius](#) would require nations to collectively reduce their planet-warming emissions roughly 43 percent by 2030 and to stop adding carbon dioxide to the atmosphere altogether by the early 2050s, the report found. By contrast, current policies by governments are only expected to reduce global emissions by a few percentage points this decade. Last year, fossil fuel emissions worldwide [rebounded to near-record highs](#) after a brief dip as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

"This is a climate emergency," said United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, adding that wealthy economies and corporations "are not just turning a blind eye; they are adding fuel to the flames. They are choking our planet, based on their vested interests and historic investments in fossil fuels, when cheaper, renewable solutions provide green jobs, energy security, and greater price stability."

The report, which was approved by 195 governments and lays out strategies that countries could pursue to halt global warming, comes as Russia's invasion of Ukraine has caused oil and gas prices to skyrocket, [diverting political attention from climate change](#). In the United States and Europe, leaders are focused on shoring up domestic fossil fuel supplies to avoid price spikes and energy shortages, even if that means higher short term emissions.

Yet climate scientists say there is little margin for delay if the world wants to hold global warming to relatively tolerable levels.

"Every year that you let pass without going for these urgent emissions reductions makes it more and more difficult," said Jim Skea, an energy researcher at Imperial College London who helped lead the report, which was compiled by 278 experts from 65 countries. "Unless we really do it immediately, it will not be possible to limit warming to 1.5 degrees."

But even if that goal becomes unattainable, scientists said, it will still be worthwhile for countries to slash emissions as quickly as possible to prevent as much warming as they can. [Every additional rise in global temperatures](#) increases the perils that people face around the world, such as water scarcity, malnutrition and life-threatening heat waves, the U.N. panel has found.

"Every fraction of a degree matters," Dr. Skea said. "Even if we go beyond 1.5, that doesn't mean we throw up our hands and despair."

Scientists say that global warming will largely halt once humans stop adding heat-trapping gases to the atmosphere, a concept known as "net zero" emissions.

The new report contains glimmers of optimism. Over the past decade, many nations have adopted ambitious climate policies, scaled back plans for new coal plants and used subsidies and regulations to expand renewable energy. Although emissions from fossil fuels are still growing worldwide, the rate of growth slowed in the 2010s, compared with the 2000s, the report said, and humanity now has a much better shot [at avoiding some of the worst-case global warming scenarios](#) once widely feared by scientists.

Clean energy technology has advanced far more quickly than expected, the report said. Since 2010, the costs of solar panels and lithium-ion batteries for electric vehicles have plunged by 85 percent, while the cost of wind turbines has fallen by more than half.

Rapidly shifting away from the fossil fuels that have underpinned economies for more than a century will require nations to do much more, however. Over the next decade, governments and companies

would need to invest three to six times [the roughly \\$600 billion](#) they currently spend annually on encouraging clean energy and cutting emissions, the report said.

But the cost of inaction is also substantial, in terms of deaths, displacement and damage. In the United States last year, damages from floods, wildfires, drought and other disasters related to weather and climate totaled approximately \$145 billion, [according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#). The agency said that “extremely high” levels of disasters were becoming “the new normal.”

“Reducing emissions substantially is much less painful than you would think, and probably beneficial in the short term,” said Glen Peters of the Center for International Climate Research in Oslo, Norway, who contributed to the report.

The new report examines dozens of strategies proposed by scientists and energy experts to help nations make the transition.

First, countries would need to clean up virtually all power plants worldwide that generate electricity for homes and factories. That means relying more on wind, solar, nuclear, geothermal or hydropower. Most of the world’s coal and natural gas plants would either need to shut down or install [carbon capture technology](#) that can trap emissions and bury them underground. Such technology has been slow to take off because of its high costs.

The next step would be to reconfigure transportation, industry and other segments of the global economy to run on clean electricity rather than fossil fuels. Cars powered by gasoline could be replaced with electric vehicles charged by low-carbon grids. Gas-burning furnaces in homes could be swapped out for electric heat pumps. Instead of burning coal, steel mills could shift to electric furnaces that melt scrap.

At the same time, nations could take steps to reduce their total energy demand. That could entail expanding public transit, upgrading insulation so homes consume less energy, recycling more raw materials and making factories more energy efficient. At the high end, such demand-side policies could help cut emissions in key sectors as much as 40 to 70 percent by 2050, the report notes.

But many economic activities can’t be easily electrified. Batteries are still too heavy for most airplanes. Many industries, like cement and glass, require extreme heat and currently burn coal or gas. For those emissions, governments and businesses will have to develop new fuels and industrial processes, the report said.

Countries will also need to address emissions from deforestation and agriculture, which account for around a fifth of global greenhouse gases. That means dealing with issues like global meat production, which emits methane and carbon dioxide, and is causing [rampant deforestation](#) in vital places like the Amazon rainforest.

Forests and wetlands naturally store carbon dioxide, which makes sparing them from destruction a highly effective and economical way to mitigate warming, said Stephanie Roe, a World Wildlife Fund scientist who helped write the report. “I can’t reiterate enough the importance of conserving those ecosystems,” she said.

Even in the best case, humanity is unlikely to eliminate all of its planet warming emissions, the report warned. So countries will likely also have to devise ways to remove billions of tons of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere each year by around midcentury. One strategy could be to plant more trees, although that may not be enough, the report cautioned. Other options include devices that suck carbon out of the air, though these technologies are still immature.

The report acknowledges the enormous challenges ahead. Winding down coal, oil and gas projects would mean job losses and financial dislocation. Some climate solutions come with major trade-offs:

Protecting forests, for instance, leaves less land for growing crops or raising livestock to feed a world population that keeps growing.

And some of the biggest obstacles to climate action are political, not technological. The report notes that “incumbent fossil fuel interests” often work to thwart policies to cut emissions. Organized disinformation campaigns by climate change deniers have, in some places, increased political polarization over the issue. And politicians tend to avoid difficult decisions if the benefits are not felt beyond the current election cycle.

In the developing world, governments still need to expand access to electricity and modern cooking fuels for hundreds of millions of the poorest people, which might only be possible in the short term by burning more fossil fuels. These nations have benefited from advances in renewable energy technology, but efforts to cut emissions deeply have run up against two longstanding issues: high costs and overstretched governments.

“If technology could solve the problem completely, the problem could have been solved two or three decades ago,” said Wei Shen, a researcher at the Institute of Development Studies, a think tank in Britain, who helped write the report.

There is strong political will in many developing nations to tackle climate change, said Fatima Denton, director of the United Nations University Institute for Natural Resources in Africa and another author of the report. But greater financial support from wealthy nations is critical, she said, partly as a matter of fairness and historical responsibility: Western countries that got rich by burning fossil fuels are now effectively telling poor nations that they cannot do the same.

“You’re telling them to leave their resources in the ground, when they have always more or less seen these as the route to more capitalism, more wealth, more prosperity,” Dr. Denton said.

China’s leader, Xi Jinping, said last year that his country would stop building new coal plants overseas, a major step toward promoting green energy in the developing world. At home, though, China is digging up and burning more coal to keep electricity flowing amid the economic disruptions of the war in Ukraine and the coronavirus pandemic. China is the planet’s top emitter of greenhouse gases.

“It’s unfortunate: These recent crises just demonstrate that if decarbonization happened earlier, then China, as well as other regions, would have been more resilient to some of these shocks,” said Cecilia Han Springer, a China expert at Boston University. “But that means there’s also an opportunity to double down.”

India’s government has increased energy efficiency in homes and factories, given farmers solar-powered water pumps and helped promote the rapid construction of solar farms. But the country’s state-run electric utilities remain in fragile fiscal health, meaning there is no guarantee that efforts to expand clean energy will be financially sustainable.

In remarks Monday, Mr. Guterres urged people around the world to press for action. “If you live in a big city, a rural area, or a small island state, if you invest in the stock market, if you care about justice, and our children’s future, I am appealing directly to you,” he said. “Demand that renewable energy is introduced now — at speed and at scale. Demand an end to coal-fired power. Demand an end to all fossil fuel subsidies.”

Worldwide, slashing emissions requires overhauling the way governments, businesses and even societies work, said Dr. Denton of the United Nations University. “That’s not an overnight thing, and it comes with some cost, whether we like it or not.”

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SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/who-says-99-of-worlds-population-breathes-poor-quality-air/
GIST	<p>GENEVA (AP) — The U.N. health agency says nearly everybody in the world breathes air that doesn't meet its standards for air quality, calling for more action to reduce fossil-fuel use, which generates pollutants that cause respiratory and blood-flow problems and lead to millions of preventable deaths each year.</p> <p>The World Health Organization, about six months after tightening its guidelines on air quality, on Monday issued an update to its database on air quality that draws on information from a growing number of cities, towns and villages across the globe — now over 6,000 municipalities.</p> <p>WHO said 99% of the global population breathes air that exceeds its air-quality limits and is often rife with particles that can penetrate deep into the lungs, enter the veins and arteries and cause disease. Air quality is poorest in WHO's eastern Mediterranean and Southeast Asia regions, followed by Africa, it said.</p> <p>"After surviving a pandemic, it is unacceptable to still have 7 million preventable deaths and countless preventable lost years of good health due to air pollution," said Dr. Maria Neira, head of WHO's department of environment, climate change and health. "Yet too many investments are still being sunk into a polluted environment rather than in clean, healthy air."</p> <p>The database, which has traditionally considered two types of particulate matter known as PM2.5 and PM10, for the first time has included ground measurements of nitrogen dioxide. The last version of the database was issued in 2018.</p> <p>Nitrogen dioxide originates mainly from human-generated burning of fuel, such as through automobile traffic, and is most common in urban areas. Exposure can bring respiratory disease like asthma and symptoms like coughing, wheezing and difficulty in breathing, and more hospital and emergency-room admissions, WHO said. The highest concentrations were found in the eastern Mediterranean region.</p> <p>On Monday, the east Mediterranean island of Cyprus suffered through high concentrations of atmospheric dust for the third straight day, with some cities experiencing three and nearly four times the 50 micrograms per square meter that authorities consider normal. Officials said the microscopic particles could be especially harmful to young children, the elderly and the ill.</p> <p>Particulate matter has many sources, such as transportation, power plants, agriculture, the burning of waste and industry — as well as from natural sources like desert dust. The developing world is particularly hard hit: India had high levels of PM10, while China showed high levels of PM2.5, the database showed.</p> <p>"Particulate matter, especially PM2.5, is capable of penetrating deep into the lungs and entering the bloodstream, causing cardiovascular, cerebrovascular (stroke) and respiratory impacts," WHO said. "There is emerging evidence that particulate matter impacts other organs and causes other diseases as well."</p> <p>The findings highlight the sheer scale of the changes needed to combat air pollution, said Anumita Roychowdhury, an air pollution expert at Center for Science and Environment, a research organization in New Delhi.</p> <p>India and the world need to brace for major changes to try to curb air pollution, including using electric vehicles, shifting away from fossil fuels, embracing a massive scaling-up of green energy and separating out types of waste, she said.</p> <p>The Council on Energy, Environment and Water, a New Delhi-based think tank, found that more than 60% of India's PM2.5 loads are from households and industries. Tanushree Ganguly, who heads the</p>

	council's program on air quality, called for action toward reducing emissions from industries, automobiles, biomass burning and domestic energy.
	"We need to prioritize clean energy access for households that need it the most, and take active measures to clean up our industrial sector," she said.
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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	04/04 Seattle crime keeps workers away
SOURCE	https://news.bloomberglaw.com/daily-labor-report/seattle-crime-keeps-workers-away-as-mayor-boosts-police-presence
GIST	<p>At a crime-ridden intersection in downtown Seattle, Amazon workers are moving out and the cops are moving in.</p> <p>In a several-block area of the city's commercial district steps from the Pike Place Market, where tourists visit the original Starbucks and gather to watch vendors sling salmon, a spate of shootings and stabbings has led police to deploy a mobile precinct amid an outcry from residents and businesses. The area has always blended tech startups with a seedier element, but as the city and businesses try to get foot traffic to return, downtown offices are bulking up on private security and stores are fashioning homemade door barriers to protect against street crime.</p> <p>At least one occupant voted with its feet after violent crime last year reached a 13-year high: Amazon.com Inc. temporarily shuttered an office in the area, telling 1,800 employees to work from other locations. Amazon has its own private security and the area has seen an influx of police officers in the past several weeks, yet workers and managers expressed concerns about safety. Other startups in the area aren't sure they'll stay.</p> <p>It's the first big test for Seattle's new mayor, Bruce Harrell, who has taken steps to address the issues but faces an impatient voter base. Swept into office on a law-and-order platform that also pledged to stem rising homelessness, crime has instead worsened downtown and the area's post-Covid rebound is lagging behind other parts of the city. Similar factors led New York City to elect Eric Adams and his tough-on-crime platform. Whether Harrell and other mayors facing such challenges succeed could dictate whether urban centers that had been flourishing before the pandemic can regain their luster for employers, residents and tourists.</p> <p>Seattle faces competition from nearby suburbs like Bellevue that have lower crime rates. Companies can move there and still recruit from the same engineering talent pool that makes Seattle an attractive home base. Amazon and Meta Platforms Inc., which have large presences in Seattle neighborhoods near downtown, are expanding in Bellevue. It's a quandary facing other mayors, too — Citadel founder Ken Griffin said his firm's future in Chicago may be counted in years, not decades, if officials don't get a handle on crime, while San Francisco is struggling with safety concerns and one of the lowest return-to-office rates of major cities.</p> <p>Seattle cops and politicians have referred to the crime-prone area as an "open-air drug market" for years, and there have been previous campaigns to arrest dealers and clean up the streets. But the issue has been particularly acute in recent weeks. Since Feb. 21, there have been at least three shootings, two stabbings and one carjacking in the area, according to information from the Seattle Police Department's Twitter account.</p> <p>Citywide, the rate of violent crime last year was the highest it had been in data going back to 2008. Nationwide, the overall violent crime rate was up 5.6% and property crimes were up 8% in 2020. Statistics for 2021 have not yet been released.</p>

Greater Seattle is the biggest U.S. tech hub outside of the Bay Area, boasting two of the five biggest tech companies by market cap, Amazon and Microsoft Corp. While Microsoft has always been in the suburbs, the population of engineers and millionaires it created have helped build a vital startup scene. Amazon has done the same, and pioneered the idea of an attractive urban campus with a vibrant bar and restaurant scene. The talent pool also attracted companies like Google, Meta and Apple Inc., and local venture capitalists shored up fields like cloud computing and artificial intelligence.

Amazon said in a statement that it's hopeful it will be able to bring back workers when it's safer.

Two Amazon executives served on Harrell's transition team, and Chief Executive Officer Andy Jassy in October said he was open to a fresh dialogue with the city. Yet Amazon's abrupt departure from the heart of downtown underscores it will take more than handshakes and toned-down rhetoric to bring business back to downtown and especially to a corridor that still looks like the backdrop to an apocalyptic movie, with shuttered storefronts armored in plywood and deserted streets.

"This is ongoing work," Harrell said at a March press conference, where he announced new steps around policing and enforcement in the area around Third Avenue. "The first step to ensuring safety has to be stabilizing the area, shutting down criminal behavior and resetting norms."

Harrell, elected in a city with a council that has repeatedly considered cutting the police budget, says he wants more and better trained cops. It's an approach other mayors are adopting as well. San Francisco Mayor London Breed and Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot, who both face re-election in 2023, have expressed a desire to get more boots on the ground.

Since taking office in January, Harrell also has focused on clearing homeless encampments from streets and parks — including one across from City Hall — and getting their residents into shelters. He's also created a new system to keep track of neighborhood concerns about encampments, but it's too early to tell if he's making progress in overall numbers of unhoused people.

"There are no quick fixes to the challenge of homelessness," Harrell's office said in an emailed statement. "The mayor has put a renewed urgency and focus on improving the city's response by streamlining department coordination and constituent engagement, working to improve data collection and city resource deployment towards helping those living unsheltered access shelter and services, and keeping sidewalks, parks and public areas clear."

His professed style pairs law enforcement and criminal prosecution with work to get addicts into treatment and social services teams to address the needs of the unhoused. In the troubled Pike/Pine blocks, he's deployed six permanent officers and additional patrols. Since Third Avenue is a key corridor for bus and light rail, stops and stations are being cleaned, and one problematic stop has been temporarily shut.

There are limits to what Seattle can control since it's part of a larger county. The city attorney's office only prosecutes misdemeanors, light rail is regional and the homelessness strategy recently shifted to a regional one as well. An effective playbook will require Harrell to forge partnerships.

"We all want to see a lot more happening a lot faster," said Heather Redman, a Seattle venture capitalist who lives and works in the troubled area. Prior to the recent city actions, Redman said there were sometimes 100 people loitering nightly on Third Avenue between Pike and Pine.

"It's like a whole kind of village of drug-related activities," she said. "There's just no reason to have that going on in the very heart of downtown where every tourist, every business and all of the transit has to go through."

Maria Karaivanova, co-founder of WhyLabs, wants to keep her artificial intelligence software company in the downtown area. It's a great central location for her employees, and her Third Avenue building has nice

amenities and stunning views of Elliot Bay. She and her workers try to support local restaurants, but when they go out for lunch, they travel in groups.

“We are making the best of it and hoping with the new mayor things will get better,” she said.

During a recent lunch hour, an Allied Universal security guard stood at the corner of Third and Union outside a gelato shop. Nearly every store was boarded up, although a few, like a Subway sandwich shop, were open behind the plywood. Three police officers kept a watchful eye at a corner, as Downtown Seattle Association cleaners picked up trash, some of which had collected in front of Benaroya Hall, home to the Seattle Symphony.

The DSA, a coalition of almost 700 businesses and nonprofits, said it steeply increased spending on off-duty cops and private security guards to more than \$500,000 between July and January. Previously, the group had private security watching over two parks, but is now deploying guards to sidewalks and public areas along Third Avenue, said Jon Scholes, the group’s president.

Still, the group is behind the new mayor. “He’s absolutely on the right track,” Scholes said.

Several hundred people packed into a hotel ballroom March 17 at DSA’s State of Downtown event, its first such in-person gathering since the start of the pandemic. The mostly maskless crowd listened to a recorded speech by Harrell, who pledged to address the safety concerns. But as waiters set up a happy hour with fried rice and sliders, attendees heard some sobering stats. Office use downtown still stands at about 30% of pre-pandemic levels, even as visitors to other places, like Pike Place Market, have rebounded.

During his election campaign, Harrell suggested getting private entities to pay more for solutions to the homelessness crisis. In recent weeks Amazon, Starbucks, Microsoft and the foundations of former Microsoft CEOs Bill Gates and Steve Ballmer pledged to donate \$10 million to a new agency set up to coordinate responses to homelessness in Seattle and King County. Marc Dones, the agency’s CEO, says the group and the administration are working on quick-impact steps to make a difference. One idea is a hotline that someone can call when they see an unhoused person in crisis. “This town, in candor, has suffered from too much visionary planning that is in five years,” Dones said. “I’m talking about a reality we can have in four weeks, five weeks.”

Bill Richter, CEO of Seattle tech company Qumulo, has been raising alarms for more than two years. That’s when gunfire erupted outside his company’s building, killing one person and injuring seven. He’s encouraged by Harrell’s steps, but says permanent change will take an ongoing police presence.

“I’m glad the mayor made the move, but boy did it take a lot of unfettered violence on the street to get them to respond,” he said.

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HEADLINE	04/04 Study: road-rage shootings rising
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/road-rage-shootings-are-rising-study-finds-11649105345?mod=hp_lead_pos12
GIST	<p>Road-rage shootings killed or injured an average of 44 people a month in 2021, according to a new study by Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund.</p> <p>That figure is double the prepandemic average of 22 people killed or wounded in such incidents each month in 2019.</p> <p>The analysis, released Monday, found that there were 728 road-rage incidents with a gun last year—the highest in the six years that the gun-control advocacy group has recorded incidents.</p> <p>The study used nonprofit Gun Violence Archive’s database, which is collected from law enforcement, government, media and other sources and verified, to analyze road-rage incidents involving a gun.</p>

	<p>“Driving gets heated in plenty of other countries, but only in the U.S. is someone shot and injured or killed every 17 hours in a road-rage incident,” said Sarah Burd-Sharps, director of research for Everytown.</p> <p>From 2016 to 2019, around one-third of road-rage incidents involving a gun resulted in injury or death, the study found. That translated to under 300 people for each of those years. In 2021, it was nearly two-thirds, or more than 500 people.</p> <p>“We don’t definitively know what is driving this increase in road-rage shootings, but the pandemic and its continuing effects have brought all kinds of new stressors into people’s lives and exacerbated underlying ones,” Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund said in a statement.</p> <p>Anxiety and uncertainty over the Covid-19 pandemic, in addition to economic uncertainty and other stresses, are causing a lot of anger on the road, said Ryan Martin, associate dean and professor of psychology at the University of Wisconsin–Green Bay.</p> <p>“One of the contributors to any angering situation is the mood we’re in at the time we are provoked,” Dr. Martin said. “If we’re already stressed, we’re more likely to snap.”</p> <p>The study found that the states with the highest rates of road-rage shootings include New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, Wisconsin and Tennessee.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 Supreme Court rules against police
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/04/us/politics/supreme-court-police-malicious-prosecution.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court ruled on Monday in favor of a Brooklyn man who said he had been falsely accused by police officers of resisting arrest, saying he could sue for malicious prosecution under a federal civil rights law.</p> <p>The vote was 6 to 3, with the majority deciding only the narrow question of what the man, Larry Thompson, had to show to meet a requirement that there was a favorable termination of the prosecution against him. Justice Brett M. Kavanaugh, writing for the majority, said it was enough that prosecutors had dropped the charges, rejecting the view that Mr. Thompson had to demonstrate that there had been some affirmative indication of his innocence.</p> <p>The case started in 2014, as Mr. Thompson, a Navy veteran and longtime postal worker, was living with his fiancée, their newborn baby girl and Mr. Thompson’s sister-in-law who, Justice Kavanaugh wrote, “apparently suffered from a mental illness.”</p> <p>When the baby was a week old, the sister-in-law called 911 and accused Mr. Thompson of sexually abusing the infant, citing a red rash on her buttocks that turned out to be diaper rash. When four police officers arrived, Mr. Thompson refused to let them in without a warrant.</p> <p>They entered anyway, tackling Mr. Thompson and pinning him to the floor. The officers handcuffed and arrested him. While he was in jail for two days, one officer filed a criminal complaint charging Mr. Thompson with resisting arrest. Prosecutors eventually dropped the charges.</p> <p>Mr. Thompson sued the officers under an 1871 federal civil rights law known as Section 1983 that allows citizens to sue state officials, including police officers, over violations of constitutional rights. He said the officers had violated the Fourth Amendment, which prohibits unreasonable seizures.</p> <p>Lower courts dismissed his malicious prosecution claim, saying that a precedent of the federal appeals court in New York required him to show “that the underlying criminal proceeding ended in a manner that affirmatively indicates his innocence.”</p> <p>Even as he ruled against Mr. Thompson in 2019, however, Judge Jack B. Weinstein of the Federal District Court in Brooklyn said the precedent “can and should be changed.” Judge Weinstein died last year.</p>

	<p>Justice Kavanaugh wrote that malicious prosecution law in 1871 generally did not require more than dismissal of charges to overcome the requirement of a favorable termination.</p> <p>“Requiring the plaintiff to show that his prosecution ended with an affirmative indication of innocence would paradoxically foreclose” a Section 1983 claim, he wrote, “when the government’s case was weaker and dismissed without explanation before trial, but allow a claim when the government’s evidence was substantial enough to proceed to trial.”</p> <p>The ruling was narrow and incremental, and Justice Kavanaugh noted that it left police officers with other ways to defeat “unwarranted civil suits,” notably including qualified immunity, the doctrine that requires plaintiffs to show not only that the officer had violated a constitutional right but also that the right had been “clearly established” in a previous ruling.</p> <p>Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. and Justices Stephen G. Breyer, Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan and Amy Coney Barrett joined the majority opinion.</p> <p>In dissent, Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr. wrote that the majority had failed to demonstrate the federal law allowed malicious prosecution claims at all, saying that Justice Kavanaugh had stitched together “elements taken from two very different claims: a Fourth Amendment unreasonable seizure claim and a common-law malicious-prosecution claim.”</p> <p>“In fact,” he wrote, “the Fourth Amendment and malicious prosecution have almost nothing in common.”</p> <p>Justices Clarence Thomas and Neil M. Gorsuch joined Justice Alito’s dissent in the case, <i>Thompson v. Clark</i>, No. 20-659.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 Deadly shooting North Seattle apartments
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/police-suspect-in-custody-after-shooting-at-north-seattle-apartment-complex
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Authorities said a suspect is in custody Monday night after a victim was shot and killed outside a North Seattle apartment complex.</p> <p>Officers were called to the 14300 block of Lenora Place North just after 9:45 p.m. for reports of a person shooting a gun out of a apartment window.</p> <p>Police found a man dead inside the apartment. The suspect barricaded himself inside an apartment after the reported gunshots, but eventually was placed in custody, police said.</p> <p>Investigators are looking into what led up to the victim's murder.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 FBI: \$10,000 reward; SEA laser strikes info
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/reward-offered-sea-tac-laser-strikes/281-e4f8d945-da05-4472-8261-635eb78a8075
GIST	<p>SEATTLE – The FBI is asking for the public’s help finding the person or persons responsible for pointing lasers at aircraft near Sea-Tac International Airport. A \$10,000 reward is being offered for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible.</p> <p>Pointing a laser at airplanes is a safety threat and could potentially cause pilots to experience flash blindness or obscured vision, endangering the lives of those on the flight. Shining a laser at aircraft is a federal crime, punishable by fines of up to \$11,000 per violation and up to \$30,800 for multiple incidents.</p>

	<p>The uptick in incidents previously prompted the FAA and Port of Seattle to ask for the public's help in February to find the person or persons responsible for shining lasers around Sea-Tac Airport.</p> <p>According to the FBI, there has been a "dramatic increase of laser incidents involving arriving commercial aircraft" in Washington state. As of March 9, over 100 incidents involving lasers being pointed at planes around Sea-Tac Airport had been reported.</p> <p>The FBI said incidents have been reported in neighborhoods around SeaTac, South Park, Highland Park, White Center, Burien, Normandy Park and Des Moines.</p> <p>The FBI said it is working with "multiple" local and federal agencies to identify and locate those responsible.</p> <p>Anyone with information is asked to contact the FBI at 1-800-225-5324 or online at tips.fbi.gov.</p> <p>Laser strikes have been on the rise nationally, with an all-time high of 9,723 laser strikes reported by the FAA in 2021.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 Arrest: deadly Sacramento mass shooting
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/police-arrest-suspect-downtown-sacramento-shooting-killed/story?id=83862107
GIST	<p>Sacramento police have arrested a suspected gunman in the shooting that killed six people in a popular nightlife area over the weekend.</p> <p>Dandrae Martin, 26, was identified as a "related suspect" in the shooting, which broke out on K Street in downtown Sacramento early Sunday morning just after a fight took place, the Sacramento Police Department said. Martin was arrested on assault and illegal firearm possession charges, police said.</p> <p>More than 100 shell casings were recovered from the scene, according to police. Investigators believe multiple gunmen are responsible for the shooting and are sifting through hundreds of pieces of evidence, Sacramento Police Chief Kathy Lester said during a press conference Sunday afternoon.</p> <p>Video posted on Twitter on Sunday showed people running through the street as the apparent sound of rapid gunfire could be heard in the background.</p> <p>The victims were identified by the Sacramento County Coroner's office on Monday as Johntaya Alexander, 21; Melinda Davis, 57; Sergio Harris, 38; Joshua Hoye-Lucchesi, 32; Yamile Martinez-Andrade, 21; and Devazia Turner, 29.</p> <p>At least a dozen people were injured in the shooting, Lester said. The conditions of the injured victims were not immediately known, police said.</p> <p>It is not known whether the alleged gunmen knew each other, Lester said. A large crowd was present at the time of the shooting, she added.</p> <p>Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg condemned the shooting during a news conference Sunday afternoon, describing it as "a senseless and unacceptable tragedy."</p> <p>"And I emphasize the word unacceptable," Steinberg said. "Thoughts and prayers are not nearly enough. We must do more as a city as a state and as a nation."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/04 DOJ task force seizes oligarch's yacht
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/russian-oligarchs-yacht-seized-dojs-kleptocapture-task-force/story?id=83868205

GIST	<p>A yacht that belongs to Russian oligarch Viktor Vekselberg has been seized in Marina Real in the Spanish port of Palma de Mallorca, according to court documents unsealed Monday.</p> <p>The yacht was seized on Monday by Spanish authorities and KleptoCapture, the Justice Department task force charged with finding the assets of oligarchs trying to evade sanctions over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>"We will now seek to have the vessel forfeited as the proceeds of a crime," Attorney General Merrick Garland said in a video message released Monday by the Justice Department.</p> <p>A spokesperson for Vekselberg did not immediately respond to a request for comment from ABC News.</p> <p>Vekselberg was designated an oligarch by U.S. authorities in 2018, when he was sanctioned by the United States following Russia's invasion of Crimea.</p> <p>Court documents say Vekselberg was subject to more sanctions once Russia invaded Ukraine.</p> <p>In addition to the seizure of Vekselberg's yacht, U.S. authorities also obtained seizure warrants unsealed in Washington, D.C., Monday that target roughly \$625,000 associated with sanctioned parties that's being held at nine U.S. financial institutions, the Justice Department said.</p> <p>The KleptoCapture task force is trying to find yachts, airplanes and other moveable property before it can be moved into jurisdictions where it might be more difficult for U.S. authorities to investigate.</p> <p>"The point of going after Putin's cronies and Russian oligarchs who seek to violate our laws and shield their assets is to say that nobody is beyond the reach of our system of justice, beyond the reach of our work and cooperation with our allies," Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco told ABC News' Byron Pitts last month. "And that these cronies and oligarchs who seek to support and bolster the Russian regime shouldn't be able to get away with that while people are dying,"</p>
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